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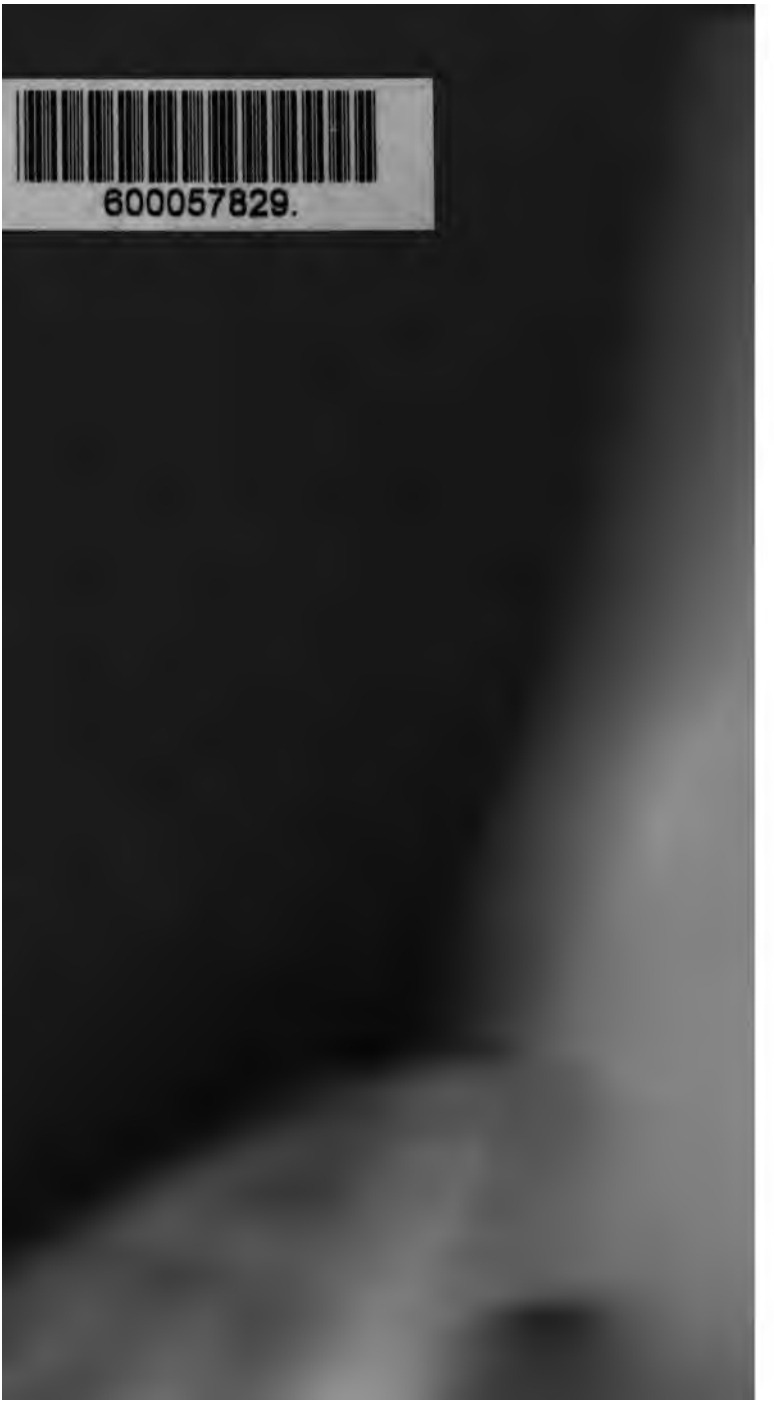
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CARRY'S CONFESSION.

VOL. III.

CARRY'S CONFESSION.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"HIGH CHURCH," "NO CHURCH,"
"OWEN: A WAIF," "MATTIE: A STRAY,"
&c., &c.

"How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true."
TENNYSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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BOOK V.

ADRIFT.

CHAPTER I.

A WORSE ESTATE.

THERE are some troubles from which a man never recovers. The shock falls, and is borne up against; but he who has stood the conflict, remains no longer the same. He is changed with the cares that have come to him.

It was so with Neal Galbraith. Naturally of a saturnine disposition, looking at life seriously, and facing life with grave responsibilities, it was not to be imagined that his trouble would not seriously affect him. He was not young in thought, when affliction met him full-front, and he stood benighted ere his day was done. He could not shake his burden from him, or regard it lightly; he hardened very much, and with that hardening process were bound up the better thoughts which had been expanding in him. He became stern and

uncharitable, shutting his eyes to the good in the world, and believing in the world's evil. Here and there perhaps a good man and woman—he would grant that—but good from their very simpleness, which set them apart from people with minds above their level. Good from their ignorance of the world—their want of experience in the world's temptations—passively good, like Pike and his niece, who thought creation confined to a few specimens of chapel-folk.

Neal knew better. He was a man of the world, worldly at two-and-twenty years of age!—a scoffer and a sceptic! Fifteen months had passed since his wife had left her home—but time had brought no peace to him. By an effort, when he was alone, it might, he had implied to the weak, wilful woman, who had taken him at his word, and left him desolate! But peace came not, only an intense feeling that God had not treated him well, the worst of feelings for a man to nurse, setting his puny will against His will, that it should come to pass! Neal betrayed his new condition but little; he was a silent man, who, if he brooded on his wrongs, but seldom gave voice to them. How often he thought of his affliction—of his

wife, and of the days when he dreamed of happiness with her, it was difficult to guess from the set features which had aged him with their immobility. Fifteen months had brought him independence, but he was not grateful for it; the scheme at which he, his father and Pike had worked so long, had resulted not alone in success, but in that pecuniary emolument which waits so seldom on success in these times.

It had been a great discovery, and in Pike's hands it led to independence for the Galbraiths and himself. It brought large sums of money in from wealthy firms, as though the old conspiracy had weighed upon the minds of the trade, and the chance of reparation was worth leaping at. Pike was a man in the trade, and knew its members—and the members of that body saw huge profits to be made by the Galbraiths' invention, and magnanimously adopted it—and paid for it.

All this an exception to the rules governing business-life; the law of patent in the poor man's hands, but the money which defeats it and fights against the right, in the hands of the capitalists. All this not quite the offspring of a distorted imagination, but a something very near the truth,

and which ended like a tragedy. A something on which we based the trade-life of this story, and a something happening every day, in this world of honourable traders.

In fifteen months, then, Neal had become, if not a rich man, at least a man independent of the world; he had given up business, and his clerkship at Mr. Pike's; he had formally declined an offer of partnership, as formally tendered him by the only man in whom he had implicit faith.

"I have no ambition to make a large fortune," Neal said, after thanking Mr. Pike for his offer; "my share of the patent will place me above want, and bring me in a few hundreds a year. That is enough for me, and I have no one to save money for."

"You will not idle time away all your life, because one stroke of luck has fallen to your share?"

"I shall devote a great deal of my time to my father—when he dies, I shall travel."

"No, you will set to work presently, I am sure, Neal. Yours should not be a profitless life, because——"

Neal hastened to interrupt him.

"Because I have not had it all my own way—

perhaps not. I will call upon you at an early day and argue the matter with you."

But Neal never called, and it was always Mr. Pike who sought out his old friend, and endeavoured to arouse him from his lethargy.

Neal was not to be roused, however; he had sketched out his career, and he intended to abide by it. He had no wish to become rich; no belief that he should ever be happy; no desire to settle down and strive for a content hitherto denied him. For he was unsettled still—terribly unsettled—for all that gravity, which was deceptive to others, and was not assumed by himself. It spoke of an awful repose, whilst it stood but as a sign of utter indifference. He was a man who had lost faith in God —and in woman. To have been so completely made a dupe, was to prove to him that there was nothing to be trusted in. All was vanity and vexation of spirit.

On that night when Carry ran away, and Pike brought good news to Fife Street, Neal, remembering Tressider's address, had gone to Mount Gardens, Lambeth, after Mrs. Higgs. Tressider had left that day for Australia, and Neal could believe that it had been all part of a plan on Carry's part to

join the actor. Even the expulsion of his father was to blind him to results, and he came home full of that thought, resolved to let her go, as unworthy of any effort of his own to bring her back. She had chosen her fate, and fled with him whom she had loved before Neal's time—so be it; it was his disgrace, and he accepted it.

And yet he *did* think now and then that he was wrong—and that his own harshness had driven his wife from home. That night when he went a second time to his father's lodgings, he heard from Mr. Galbraith the true history of yesterday's incidents—how Carry had confronted Tressider, and shamed him; and he remembered it at times still, though her name never escaped him, and it was to bring a furrow to his brow to hear it mentioned by others. But, as time stole on, he had less generous thoughts; she had gone away from home in defiance of him, forgetful of her marriage vow, and of her wifely duties, and they were for ever after that separated by a gulf which no love could bridge over. For that last act, no excuse—whatever had gone before, and might have been extenuated in a time for sober reasoning, was not worth dwelling upon in the days that faced him then.

Tressider had gone abroad that day—Mr. and Mrs. Webber had been surprised in Shepherd Street by Mrs. Higgs, and Carry had not sought their help —she had deliberately chosen her fate, and his!

Neal had removed from Fife Street, leaving no sign behind him. He had taken his father to a little villa at Streatham, and constituted Mrs. Higgs his housekeeper.

"You were always a good servant and a true friend," he said to her; "devote yourself to my father's comfort, until I am fit to be his companion again. Presently I shall be a different man."

"Ah! very soon, I hope, Master Neal."

"Don't worry me—don't preach to me—leave me to myself, and I shall come round. Why, I am young still!"

"That you are."

But he consoled not Mrs. Higgs any more than himself—for the hope in his words was not seconded by any hope in his voice or his face. He was not a man stricken down at the outset of life, but a man with all hopes perverted. He was a young man to bear so heavy a load, perhaps—but if he had thought more often of his own share in his discomfiture, it would have been the better for him.

Mr. Pike never relaxed in his uphill efforts to make a different man of Neal. Baffled often—not always spared the curt reply or ironical rejoinder, so trying to him who speaks in good faith—still Mr. Pike plodded on in Neal's cause, in much the same manner as he plodded on in business. Not very brilliant or original in ideas, but patient, persevering, and always meaning well.

Mr. Pike had removed from Crow Street to Hackney Road, a place handy for his business, convenient to his chapel, and a change for the better, so far as regarded locality. The distance between him and Neal did not deter him from frequent visits; in the "long evenings" he was at Neal's house once a week, towards the winter he came less often; as the spring veered round again—it was getting on for March, and two years since Neal's wedding-day—he began to appear with his old regularity.

Neal bore with him, rather than expressed any delight at his comings and goings. Fifteen months' isolation had not rendered him more complaisant, or reconciled him to his lot. And yet he feigned to be resigned.

"I wish that you would come to Hackney Road

now and then, Neal," urged Mr. Pike, for the eleventh time that year, "it's just as if you had grown tired of Addie and me, or that we had offended you in some way."

"I am not very good company just now," Neal replied; "we have no experiments to prosecute, and I should only be a nuisance to you."

"Try," replied Pike.

"Not just yet."

"It's a long time since you have seen Addie. You would not believe how she has improved, or what a good little woman she is."

"I can believe it, Mr. Pike. She was brought up by a good man, true and simple-hearted. If she marry a man like herself, one of her own class, she will be very happy all her life."

"I'm not thinking of her marrying yet a while."

"No. It will be like losing an only daughter when the time comes."

Neal would relapse into thought again, and leave his father to the duties of host—his father, gentle and forbearing now, stronger perhaps in mind, if weaker in body. There was no one to cross the even tenor of old Mr. Galbraith's way; he had risen in the world too, and was

happy. He had received his share of the patent's value, and the satisfaction of having invented or originated something new, had brought back almost his own self.

Later in the evening, Neal would accompany Mr. Pike part of the way homewards—occasionally all the way, pausing at the corner of the terrace in which Mr. Pike's new house was situated, and shaking his head at all inducements to enter.

"No—it is late—some other time."

"Well, as it is late, I'll not press you. But you will come soon."

"Yes."

Neal always promised that. It saved discussion and dismissed the subject. But he had no love for the quiet home of the Pikes, and it was not aversion to society that kept him away. There were strange dashes at life—life in its worst aspect —that beset Neal, for all his stoicism. It was the reaction that hurled him from the solitariness of his position, and took him recklessly into temptation. It was that terribly unsettled state, which he could mask so well by his grave looks, that led him on. Scarcely into temptation, for he was

temptation-proof to all appearance; he passed scathless in the midst of vice, but he sought it for its distraction, and looked about him with a kind of wondering interest at the evil which seethed round him.

When they thought at Streatham that he was in his bed, he had let himself out of the house, and gone wandering to West End cafés, or to suburban gardens, where effrontery in its finest feathers plied its trade and scoffed at all that was virtuous under heaven. Neal's face became known in these haunts, but scarcely Neal. He passed through them, interested in the whirligig of life, wherein fools were swallowed up, and knaves met knaves and made high holiday—but it was always with the same stern looks or scornful cynicism. Men stared at him—habitués of such places—and wondered what he wanted there. Women were suspicious of that grave face, and thought at first that he had come to preach to them—until he came too often, and said too little. Now and then a woman of greater boldness than the rest would face him with a wanton's jest, but he would tell her, with a scorn that even touched *her* pride, that time was wasted on him,

and she had better leave him to himself. He became a riddle at last, which people did not care to solve; it was only on chance occasions that the mistake occurred of intruding on his reverie.

That mistake occurred on the night he pleaded want of time for going home with Pike, and then turned westward. He had called a cab, and been driven to the cafés—the Haymarket dens that a wise legislature has thought fit to look after lately, and looks after with one eye shut still.

Into his old haunt, and sitting in the corner of a long room—bright and garish with its lights and mirrors, and hideous by its company. He had one favourite corner there, where he would sit for hours—even till the daylight shamed him—with his coffee untasted on the marble table before him. He smoked constantly now, and as he puffed away cigar after cigar, he watched human nature in its worst phase, and thought more uncharitably than ever. Occasionally he was startled by men whom he had known, and who had been pointed out to him as good and honourable men—entering into life there—and he

shrugged his shoulders, as the veil dropped from their hypocrisies. It was the same all the world over, and no man was better than his fellow-men; only in such places as these could life be seen—life with its mask off, and its face of cupidity undisguised for the nonce.

On that night he parted with Pike last, a woman, more bold than usual, or more curious, or more drunk with wine, or all three together, dropped into a chair facing the table at which he sat, and stared hard at him. Neal had seen this woman, in all her wealth of wardrobe, twenty times at least—a handsome, black-eyed girl, who should have been still as innocent as a child at her mother's side.

"What the deuce have you got to think about in this place, old fellow?" she said familiarly.

"About many things."

"I should like to know what you want here so often—sometimes I fancy it's the devil sitting in a corner, waiting to pick the worst of us out?"

"Perhaps it is."

"Take me, then—I don't care how soon—not I!"

"Ask your God to take you in His mercy—not the devil," said Neal.

"Oh! don't come that here!—that won't do, you know!"

"I don't ask you to listen to me."

"No, but I don't want to hear that cant. Will you treat us to some cherry-brandy?"

"No."

"Will you tell me what you want here?"

"I am expecting some one."

"A woman?"

"Yes."

"Oh! that's a good one!—that's it!" she said, rising half jealously; even these castaways are strangely jealous; "well, you've waited long enough."

"She will come in time!"

Neal believed that, and for that, as betrayed in his answer to the woman, he was waiting. For that he wandered to and fro amidst the haunts which decent men knew nought of, and bided his time for the moral of the story. What he would do, what he would say, whether he should speak to her, he never told himself—but there was a strange infatuation in the motive which set him in these places, and filled him with the conviction that he should meet *her* there. Now and then a figure

like Carry's, a face like his young wife's, made his heart collapse with the sudden fear that it was she—but the mistake was perceived at the second glance, and it was only a new face, not hers! With every night new faces—the tide was never still that cast them on these barren sands.

At times, also, the face and figure of Tressider, but not Tressider, caused him to clench his hands and hold his breath. Was he waiting for him too?—nursing, in that heart full of uncharitableness, a deadly hate, whence might evolve serious consequences? It was possible; for neither man nor woman escaped his vigilant glance, and as time stole on he came more frequently, and evinced more interest in the show.

These places were his distraction, and there *was* temptation therein, though he knew it not. He was unfitting himself more and more for the home where he had looked for peace—it was the worst of schools wherein to learn indifference to misfortune. It was the surest and the broadest road to ruin—and yet, with confidence in himself and in his apathy, he took his way thereon.

CHAPTER II.

"BROKEN UP."

IT was March at last, and the anniversary of Neal's wedding-day had been passed silently by, when a visitor arrived at Edleigh Villa. A visitor who scared Mrs. Higgs by his general appearance, his equipage, his alteration in demeanour.

"Good lor!—*is* that you!" she exclaimed from the top step; "I can't believe it yet awhile!"

"Don't, if you like, marm—nobody asked you."

Yes, it was he—it was his voice, at least—the voice of Mr. Webber, Carriage-Breaker, of Shepherd Street.

Mrs. Higgs stood and gasped still. She had not visited Shepherd Street since the night of Carry's flight, when Mr. Webber had exulted in the result of all his doleful prophecies, and her sister Johannah had feigned to think that it was everybody's fault but hers—she having done her duty all her

life, and everybody, but herself, having persistently neglected it. Mrs. Higgs had seen the beginning of a quarrel between Mr. Webber and his better-half, and had hastened away, heart-broken, before the storm burst forth. She had thought to have seen the last of her relations then; and here was Webber the boisterous, at her gate in a Bath-chair; and surely here was Mrs. Webber, in the same shabby silk, advancing up the garden-path.

"Now, do you want any help, Webber?" his wife asked sharply.

And to have seen the scared look of Mr. Webber was as good as a play of retributive justice, in three acts, and twelve tableaux.

"No—not yours. You're too rough, by half—here, Sampson, lend a hand!"

Sampson, the man who had dragged him thither, lent a hand accordingly, and Mr. Webber, very much shrunken, very feeble on one side, and out of all shape on the other, was hauled out of his Bath-chair, and assisted up the steps into the hall.

"Where's your master, Mrs. Higgs?"

"My young master?"

"Yes—the man who married Carry."

Mr. Webber attempted still his old manner—and occasionally there rang out the trumpet tones of defiance to everything and everybody; but time had got the better of this man, and taken him unawares. He had lost that brute strength, which gave such brute force to his past demeanour, and a sudden blow of Fate had broken him up, like one of his own carriages.

"He's at home. I 'carcely know if he will see you, Webber."

"Ask him, please."

Webber suddenly became submissive—he was a man of many moods now, and Mrs. Higgs wondered more and more.

"You've been brought very low, Webber, to do the humble in this fashion," she said, as he was landed on a chair in the hall, and propped somewhat carelessly against the wall.

"It's a damned Guy Fawkes fashion!—ain't it, Mrs. Higgs?" he said savagely; "no one knows that better than I do. I did not deserve it—I always paid my way, and acted up to the mark—and it's precious hard!"

"It was a stroke that took him as he was going

downstairs, swearing at me for being late with breakfast," explained Mrs. Webber. "It was like a judgment!"

"You're a judgment!" retorted Mr. W.

"And now look what a hobject he is, Hannah," said Mrs. W.; "a big, strong man as he was only six months back! Like a horse for strength!"

"Ah! I was!" sighed Mr. Webber.

"He used to brag of living all of us out—Joe, Carry, and me, and now he'll go before the lot of us—see if he don't!"

"Oh! what a horrible woman you are!" said Mr. Webber, with a groan.

"And never grateful—not a mite of that, bless you! And never sorry for all the trouble that he is! Always on the work and fidget—aren't you?"

"Well I may be!"

"The doctor says he'll have another stroke if he goes on so; and that'll take him off, see if it don't —clean."

"It'll be the worst day's work for you, if it does," he said, implying by his vindictive nod towards her that he should hold her responsible for that calamity.

"If you'll wait a moment, I'll speak to Master Neal," said Mrs. Higgs.

"Ah! do—tell him I've been all day coming up here after him, for this fellow crawled like any crab!"

"See what a hill it is!" grumbled the man.

"But see what wheels you've got!" said Webber; "didn't you pick the best out in the place for that confounded match-box?—didn't you knock it up just as you liked, you——"

"You'll be boxed up nicely enough presently, Webber, if you give way to tantrums. I know you will," reminded his wife.

"What's the fellow aggravating me for?"

The fellow—one of Mr. Webber's own men—enlisted into special service sore against his will, retired into the front garden, and sat on the edge of his Bath chair. Mrs. Webber and husband faced each other in the hall.

"Where's the money come from to keep this place up?" asked the carriage-breaker, sullenly—"I thought he'd come to beggary."

"Ah! so did I."

"And here's a pretty place—and she to run

away like a fool—there's no making out my children!"

"Keep quiet, will you, and don't talk so much!"

Mr. Webber cowered when his wife spoke sharply. He was in her hands; he was indebted to her for all attention now—the tables were turned; she reigned paramount, and he could but gnash his teeth at the mutation. She had been so quick to see her advantage, too, and, although she did not treat him badly, and knew, after a fashion, her duty as a wife, still she was not a woman full of kindness, or mindful of his feelings, as Mrs Higgs had not been slow to perceive that morning. But then Johannah had never had very fine feelings, or she would have scarcely have succumbed to the blandishments—far from tender in the best days—of Mr. Webber. Mrs. Higgs, meanwhile, had repaired to a room at the back of the house—a room looking on the garden, and called Neal's study, though what Neal studied there but his wrongs, it was difficult to guess.

Mr. Galbraith was sitting there with his son, trying to interest him in some new plans, upon which he had been occupied lately. Both looked

up as Mrs. Higgs entered after the preliminary rap.

"Here's some odd visitors to-day, at any rate."

"Visitors for us?" said Neal—"who comes here that we care to see at this hour?"

"It's Mr. Webber—and his wife—from Shepherd Street."

Neal was silent for a time, but he did not betray any further surprise.

"What do they want?" he asked at last.

"I don't know—they haven't said."

"I have nothing in common with them—nothing that makes such people welcome here. Tell them so."

"I will, if you wish it. But——"

"But what, Mrs. Higgs?"

"But I don't think any harm could come of seeing them, and, mayhap, good might."

"Impossible!"

Neal did not repeat his uncourteous message, and Mrs. Higgs withdrew presently to reappear, ushering in Mr. and Mrs. Webber arm-in-arm. Mrs. W. led Mr. Webber with difficulty to a chair, and then sat down by his side. Neal slightly

moved his head to the "Good day to you" of the carriage-breaker, and then ensued a silence that there seemed some difficulty in again disturbing.

"I never thought," Mr. Webber said at last, "that I should have taken the trouble to come after you all this way, but times have altered very much. I'm not the man I was—I'm not as strong, I daresay, as that old man there, who's the very chap that pelted me with bread once. Good God! how well he wears!"

"I—I never pelted anybody!" said the amazed Mr. Galbraith.

"Ah! you weren't accountable for your actions then, old gentleman!"

"Father, will you leave us?" suggested Neal; "this is a man who was never pleasant company. Now, sir," he added, when Mr. Galbraith had followed Mrs. Higgs from the room, "will you tell me what you want in this house?"

"I know it's a liberty," said Mr. Webber, suddenly submissive, "but you'll look over it for once, on account of my affliction. I shan't come here again, I daresay."

"I daresay not," said Neal, drily.

"I shouldn't have thought of coming here a year ago," he whined; "I was as strong as a house then, and didn't care for anybody. But I've been floored, and I'm not like myself; and there's only this tiresome old woman to make my life a misery."

"That's his gratitude, Mr. Galbraith. You allers knew how grateful he was!"

"Why, she can't read, sir," explained Mr. Webber. "I married her with all her ignorance in full blow, and now I see the fool I was. When I wasn't in this—this cursed condition," he added, with fretful vehemence, "it was different, for I could find my own amusement in my business and loan offices, but to sit at home all day with this dreary wretch for company!"

"Never mind my feelings, Webber!" said his wife; "you never did—you never will! Go on, my man!"

"I don't think you mind my feelings much."

"You'll be sorry for all this when you're brought lower. And lower than this you'll come, depend upon it!"

"If it depended upon you, no doubt I should! You'd like me dead, and all the money in your hands, wouldn't you?"

"I'd like you to behave yourself just now—if you want any attention from me!"

"That's how she domineers, sir," said Mr. Webber, appealingly; "She breaks my spirit with her ways. I hate a domineering disposition—it's galling, Mr. Galbraith, very galling!"

And Mr. Webber actually wiped his eyes with the back of one shaking hand. Neal regarded him with curiosity.

"What do you want with me?"

"Look here, sir," he said, earnestly, "I want my daughter Carry back!"

Neal half-rose in his chair, and then sat down again. What did the man mean by coming here and mentioning a name, upon which his solemn interdict was set? Was not the husband's shame deep and lasting enough, without dragging that name to the daylight? He repressed his answer for awhile, and looked steadily at the man who had ever opposed his pursuit of Carry. Neal had defeated him, but his victory had cost him dearly. If that man had had his way, how much better for all now! What a different and brighter life for everybody!

"I want my daughter Carry back," implored

Mr. Webber, in tones more earnest and new; "I want her back to take care of me, and make home a different place. I ain't the man I was, sir!"

Strange reiteration of this fact, easy to be seen, as though even with the evidence of his break down the confirmation of his word was needed. The world would not believe that he, Webber, of Shepherd Street, had fallen so low, without his assertion to that truth—a man like him, who had known no meekness, or let any domestic calamity affect *him!* Why, his wife was an idiot, his son would have broken most fathers' hearts, and his daughter had married in wilful disobedience to his wishes, and he had not cared one rap. He had shaken them off his mind, and kept to carriage-breaking, and money-making, without much thought of the past; he had never forgiven his children, or cared about their well-doing—and yet all this philosophy had gone out of gear when he was struck at with the rest.

"I know not anything of your daughter, Mr. Webber—neither do I wish to know."

"Hasn't she written?—has not anybody written telling you where she might be found?"

"No."

"I wouldn't mind her goings on, or what she had done, or what she was, so that she came back to me. After all, she was the only one who ever understood me—and what a nurse she'd make!"

"The trouble she'd take off my shoulders too!" added Mrs. Webber.

"Ah! you only think of yourself," said the husband; "that's like you. But I think of Carry, hard up for a home perhaps, and knowing not that there's a home for her whenever she likes to come, and a father and mother waiting for her, to let her have her own way—which she always liked so much, poor thing! I thought you might have known, sir; and though you ain't the man to forgive anything, yet you might have let me know."

"She is in Australia, probably," said Neal, coolly.

"She was such a loving, good sort of girl, when she had her own way," reflected Mr. Webber. "Lor', to hear her laugh when she was happy! I always checked it, because I didn't like people laughing about the house then, and singing and making all kinds of noises, but I wish I had the chance of hearing 'em now!"

"Your chance has gone, like mine," said Neal.

"You did not understand her, and she did not understand me, and so she fled both homes like a pestilence. But you were a fool to let her have me. You should have taken her away when she was firm, and kept her from me. You trained her up to evil and deceit, and then cast her off, to bring evil into honest homes. Begone—get from my house—you offend me by your presence here!"

Neal had lost his self-possession, but it was momentary. The pent-up passion of his nature was compressed again, and he said an instant afterwards, and before Mr. Webber had recovered from Neal's attack,

"I cannot enlighten you as to your daughter's actions, and, therefore, need not detain you any longer. I am not well to-day—you will excuse any excitement on my part."

Mrs. Webber rose, and made preparations for hauling up her lord and husband. She turned to Neal, and shook her ghastly head at him to and fro, half sorrowfully, half-reproachfully.

"If you had knowed her natur' better, or had been more kind and gentle—which we never was, God forgive us!—she might have been here now,

a wife and mother in your house, a comfort to you and me. I see now—old woman as I am—where we was wrong, and I think we're all to blame a little."

"Her own fault," murmured Neal.

"When Tressider didn't know that she was married, and wrote to her to have him——"

"When was that?" interrupted Neal.

"The eighth of July, 18—, it came on a Friday morning and brought ill-luck enough. I thought that if it had come earlier, she might have had him and been happy with him, for he was good-tempered and kind, at all events."

"And I was not—well, it is not worth arguing now."

"No. Come up, Webber," she said, addressing him in donkey-driver fashion; "you'll sit maundering all day now—and a minute lost was a thing to be growled at and swore at hard enough once. Are you ready—or are you not?"

"I'm ready. What are you in such a hurry about?"

"The *gentleman* wants us gone," she said ironically.

"I'm trying to think of what else I wanted to

say, but that infernal shock wouldn't even let my brains alone—oh! now I recollect!"

He had risen and was hanging by Mrs. Webber's arm—his ponderosity, or dead weight, almost too much for her, though she clutched his hand with both of hers. He looked appealingly at Neal again.

"You needn't be too hard upon her when she comes back here and asks to be taken in. Before you shut the door in her face—as you, her husband, may feel it right to do, and I don't blame you—tell her that I ain't the man I was, and don't care what she is, so that she comes back. I'm broken up, sir!"

Neal moved his head, as though he implied assent to this man's request, and Mr. Webber thanked him with a grave humility.

Husband and wife had scuffled to the door, when they paused again. Mrs. Webber had another word to say.

"Carry was allers a high sperited girl—wus for her that was—but she never meant no harm in my time. If she's changed, you changed her, I'm inclined to think."

"Madam, you must think what you will. This

is a subject that I never dwell on—that I shut out," he added with an impatient gesture.

"And I do have a fancy, now and then, that she's with Joe, and not with that play-acting feller. She and Joe—both madcaps in their way—were fond of each other, and would always help each other. If I only knew where Joe had got to!"

"Joe's a bad one," affirmed Mr. Webber, not all forgiveness yet; "he's not worth thinking about. Carry with *him*, indeed!"

"And if her brother took care on her, sir—" began Mrs. Webber, when Neal interrupted her again.

"There is no explaining a wife's absence from her husband's home—I resent any excuse for that—I brand her guilty under any circumstances."

"But I'm her mother, sir—and I wouldn't. I was not thinking of what *your* pride would do—not I!"

And, with a pride that even rendered this ignorant woman dignified, she and her husband left the lonely man. Neal went to the door and locked it after them. He did not desire their return; he

did not wish for any intruders upon him yet awhile. He sat down at the table again, and opened the window as though he needed air; the cold wind came soughing into the room. He sat down to think of this strange interview—of *her* father and mother, who had been ever opposed to him, confronting him in that house. Confronting him also with the past, which would steal back upon him, though he had pressed it down in his heart, set his seal upon it, and tried to live it down! The mother's words shaped themselves anew into an accusation against him, and he sought to resist them, as a misconception and injustice.

"If you had knowed her nature better, or had been more kind and gentle, she might have been here now—a wife and mother in your house."

Ah! what might he have answered to that sad reproach! If *she* had but known him better, thought less of many angry words, which came not from his heart—believed in that love which, despite all false appearances, had remained with him even at the worst.

He had had no mercy upon her at the last; but then mercy would have implied weakness, and she had not solicited it. But if he had asked her to

tell him all, to clear up all mystery and rely upon his love, might she not have proved that she was innocent, even in thought, against him? For an instant it seemed possible; the lights upon his darkened way seemed flickering in the distance, indicating life and hope; but it was for an instant only, and then his heart closed, and his better thoughts sank back a hundred times more deeply.

She had left his home—she had never written a line to him asking pardon, offering explanation, or caring for that grief, which at one time he feared would wreck a brain, weak by inheritance. She never cared for him; she never loved him—"GUILTY!" in his eyes and his God's!

He was glad that he had locked the door, and no one knew how weak he was still—or what a bitter trouble he had yet to fight against, or what a child, in his grief and pain, he could verily become.

CHAPTER III.

MR. PIKE GETS ANXIOUS.

TO feel that a man was proceeding in a wrong direction, and that the power to help that man was denied him, was ever a trouble to Mr. Pike. He had experienced that trouble more than once in life—for he was one who did not wholly mind his own business, and was all the better for his disregard of a rule considered golden—but never with so much intensity and mental excitement.

He had been grieved by Walter Tressider's moral decadence, when Walter was a clerk in his uncle's house, falling into debt, and forming acquaintances the reverse of eligible. He had done his best to arrest Tressider's career; he had taken him home, once or twice with the desire to turn his mind to other pursuits, and he had hoped to have been successful, until the climax was reached, and Tressider confessed his ruin in that

house in Crow Street. He had been sorry for a young man who had given proof of some good works; he had been always interested in him—as it was his nature to be ever interested in struggling human-kind—but it was not the interest that he had had for Neal.

When we think seriously of Mr. Pike, of his simple-mindedness, with faith in his own powers, and with old-fashioned ideas about tract distributing, tea-meetings, and chapel-folk; when we remember his unselfishness, and his untiring efforts, not always after the best fashion, to do good, we wonder if we have given a fair impression of him to our readers? Pure-idead men, with an evenness of character and a monotony of action, are difficult to portray, and still more difficult to arouse an interest in—it is the stormy elements of human nature which make their mark in novels.

Mr. Pike was troubled seriously, then, about Neal. Neal Galbraith had become quickly his favourite; Neal's honesty, his straightforwardness, which went at once to its object, had aroused speedily an interest. He detected the elements of much nobleness of character in Neal; and in the faults that stood in the way, he but saw subject-

matter for experiment. He was as fond of moral experiments as of physical, and he thought of Neal as a subject that would be ever handy to his touch, and come out a perfect model of propriety. In his heart he was a vain man, for he had an overweening confidence in his own powers of turning the sinner from evil; and if perseverance could alone have brought him success, he would have never lost faith in his skill.

Before he had seen Neal, he had been interested in the Galbraiths—he had had more than a suspicion of the foul play that had been practised on them in the time of the first invention; and had been collecting proofs and storing facts, with the intention of taking up their defence in good time, when Neal entered service with the Tressiders. He was even biding his time, when Mr. Tressider bade time adieu—for Mr. Pike was a patient man. But now he had lost all patience, for he saw no progress in Neal Galbraith. The wife's desertion had altered the husband for the worse; and it appeared as if all the influence for good which he, Mr. Pike, possessed was futile to turn his friend from his misanthropy.

Mr. Pike called it misanthropy, but he was at a

loss for a name to assign to Neal's demeanour. He had believed it grief at first, and heaped Neal's table with tracts concerning consolation for every phase of sorrow; he had fancied it at times remorse; latterly he began to fear that it might be desperation. He knew that Neal's mind was different from most men's—was more retentive, and of a deeper character. At an early age, Neal had met with the greatest trouble that can befall an honourable man, and Pike saw that no diminution of gloom came with the time that set the past away from him. Fifteen months had more than gone by since the wife's desertion of her home, and Neal remained the same impassive being. He could not speak of that wife; he shunned all allusion to his wrong, and resented it as an insult; he evinced but little interest in that success which had made him independent—although he owned that he was grateful for the liberty it gave him—he was not even glad to see Mr. Pike!

"This habit will grow upon him," Mr. Pike said, one day, to Addie, to whom he communicated all the details of his interviews with Neal; "he is settling down to everything that is objectionable and I can't help him."

"Poor Neal!" said Addie, "I wish that I could be of assistance to him in his trouble. He was like a brother at last."

"Ah! he was," sighed Pike. "I don't think that I should have ever liked a brother as I like him. I don't know why it is—his character don't resemble mine, he objects to chapel people, and used to make fun of them sometimes. I would give a good deal of money to hear him make fun of anything now!"

"Why, I think you like him better than me, uncle," said Addie, almost pouting.

"Hush!—not quite. But he's in trouble, and he's going wrong, and I don't see the way to help him. If you would help too, Addie."

"I help?"

"He would not mind you calling with me at his house, just for once to break the ice again."

"I help!" repeated Addie, thoughtfully.

"Why not?"

"Sometimes I fancy that I am an unlucky woman, and mar good intentions by my interference," said Addie, in reply; "and I could not be of help to Neal. I see the shadow of his wife resenting

any step on my part. She was a poor, wild girl, ready to think harm of me."

"And to do much grievous harm to others," said Mr. Pike, sternly; "we need not think of her, or care for her."

He was a hard man, too, in one respect. For a great sin, he was not inclined to offer pardon. He turned from the sinner, unable to comprehend the nature of a temptation which could abase a soul—for a man or woman wilfully setting aside God's laws, he saw no excuse, and would not hear of any. His was a life strangely pure as it were, and he judged too much by his own standard to be wholly faultless.

Addie was thinking of the inutility of her services, and of the folly perhaps of her uncle's suggestion, when a servant entered to announce a visitor.

"I didn't hear a knock," said Mr. Pike.

"It was the area-bell as rung, sir. A woman as has called, sir."

"Not—not a young woman?"

Mr. Pike's fears immediately suggested the wife —Neal's wife—coming back to ask their mediation. He was ever full of one subject.

"No, an old woman, sir—Mrs. Higgs by name."

"Show her up—something's the matter. My dear," he said to Addie, tugging at his stock for breath, "some—some—something has happened to that boy!"

Mrs. Higgs entered with her usual briskness, but her manner did not satisfy Mr. Pike.

"Anything happened?—what is it? Anything new?"

"No, sir—nothing new—I wish there had been."

The old lady took off her bonnet for air, without waiting for an invitation, and fanned herself with it. She too had aged marvellously with the family trouble, although the man and woman looking at her were not the people to observe that. Mr. Pike had seen her several times, and Addie more than once had heard Neal speak of the faithful servant and good friend, but neither was in a position to note the change in her. She was only a minor character in the great plot which wrecked Neal's peace, but she felt as much as any of them, though she said very little.

"It's—it's very kind of you to give us a look in," said Mr. Pike; "Addie, dear, Mrs. Higgs will take a glass of wine."

"No, I wont!" said Mrs. Higgs; "I'm in a hurry, and I haven't time for it. I asked for an hour to go shopping; and I thought I'd run over here and try and find you out, and have a bit of talk with you," turning to Pike, "*his* friend."

"Yes, his friend, surely."

"Don't you think that that boy's altering very much? Oh! I see it every day myself, sir, and it worries me."

"I don't see any alteration in him—I wish I did!"

"Mr. Pike, you don't know all. I know you do your best to alter him, and that he'll listen to you and not to me—an ignorant old woman enough—and I thought I'd come and tell you all!"

"Go on, please," said Mr. Pike, becoming excited as well as interested.

"He's going wrong—I know he is!" said Mrs. Higgs, pausing a moment to wring her hands spasmodically; "that clever boy, who might have been so happy, if he'd married well, sir. Or," in a husky whisper, "he's going mad, like his poor father did!"

"Great heavens!—I hope not!" fervently ejaculated Mr. Pike.

"He can't shake it off—the Galbraiths allers had minds that wouldn't shake off things, somehow. I mind 'em speaking about a grandfather, who——"

"There, there—never mind the grandfather—go on."

"He sits and thinks awfully, Neal does," continued Mrs. Higgs; "he don't care to speak—he leaves even his father to me now. *That* you know?"

"Yes, I know that."

"But you don't know that his restless fit comes on when we're away from him—that he leaves the house in the night, and goes God knows where—that there are days, and days now, when he don't come nigh us."

"Good gracious!"

"And when he does come back, he's worse! He keeps away from us more; and in time he'll kill his father now, for even *he* frets."

"I'll talk to Neal. I'll come to-morrow."

"Oh! you mustn't talk to him, or he'll guess that I've told you, and turn me away. He's not a man to be very 'siderate now, I'm sure."

"Well, well, you may rely upon me not abusing

your confidence. I'll do my best, but"—with a sigh, that confessed his want of power—"my best is very little."

Mr. Pike went the next evening to Streatham, but found no opportunity of speaking seriously to Neal. Neal divined that that opportunity was wanted, and evaded all communion with his friend. He brought his father into the foreground, and rendered that old gentleman voluble concerning his plans—which had become very misty lately—and when Mr. Pike rose to depart, he did not make the usual offer of accompanying him part of his way home.

"You are not going out to-night, Neal?" said Pike, wistfully.

"Not to night."

"Well, I shall see you soon. I have been thinking of bringing Addie here one evening next week."

"If there be anything here to amuse her, do. I am afraid she will find it very dull at Streatham."

"Then you'll not venture out to-night, Neal?"

"No, thank you—if you will excuse me."

They shook hands and parted. Neal would not even trust himself to the street door with his friend

that night; and Mrs. Higgs, watching for an opportunity, found it in the hall.

"He's going out to-night, sir," she said hastily; "I heard him tell his father that he was off early to bed; and I know what that means, now."

"Bless my soul!—what can be the good of all this mystery!"

"He thinks his father is happy knowing nothing—and perhaps he is."

"Have you ever spoken to him?"

"Oh! I daren't—I daren't!"

Mr. Pike could not understand that fear, at least. He would speak to Neal that very night. Addie was not to sit up, and time did not matter to him, if it were spent in a good cause—and Neal was going wrong, he feared.

Mr. Pike wandered to and fro on the other side of the roadway, keeping his gaze directed to the house. He would wait an hour, two hours, on the strength of Mrs. Higgs's suspicions. If he could confront Neal, perhaps Neal, in a burst of grief, remorse, and confidence, would tell him all; and then the means to the moral cure might be ready to hand.

Mr. Pike heard Mrs. Higgs draw the heavy

chain across the door, and fasten every bolt—he watched the lights die out in the house fronting him. Surely Neal would not come now—why, there was a clock chiming half-past ten in the distance! He would wait a short while, however—there was only himself to inconvenience by lingering about this dark region, and he might find a cab to take him home presently.

He was wondering if he had really waited long enough, when the street door was cautiously unfastened from within. His heart sank, but he tried to nerve his courage to meet his friend going out to danger. The door was opened and closed, and Neal came forth, a dark figure in his cloak. He went at a rapid pace towards the main road, ignorant of watchers, and Mr. Pike had to run to overtake him. At the corner of the street a cab was waiting for Neal Galbraith.

"Have I kept you long?"

"No, sir—not very."

Neal was stepping into the cab, when Mr. Pike touched him on the shoulder.

"Neal, where are you going at this time of the night?"

"Where spies are not needed in the shape of friends," said Neal, quickly. "What do you want here at this hour?" he asked in a more angry tone.

A little disturbed Neal now, and rendered him ungenerous.

"I wanted to see you again—to know whither you were going, and with what motive?"

"My motives are purposeless," said Neal, "but they must not be intruded upon, nevertheless."

"Neal, you are going wrong."

"No, I am going west."

Mr. Pike did not relish the scornful jest, but he made no comment upon it. It was unkind of Neal, and unlike him.

"May I accompany you?" he asked almost submissively.

"If you wish to see life, and would shake off the rust of life's inaction—come by all means."

Mr. Pike stepped into the cab also, and Neal and he were driven rapidly away. Neal was annoyed by Mr. Pike's intrusion, but he cared not to dwell upon the indignity proffered him. He was more annoyed that Mr. Pike had encountered him at the corner of the street, stealing from the

house like a robber. There was no occasion for it; he was his own master, thought Neal; it was a false sense of delicacy that took him from his home thus stealthily, and led to difficulties which a more open conduct would have avoided. He had been ashamed to own that his awful sense of loneliness —his wife's desertion of him, if they willed to call it so—necessitated a reaction that dashed into the thick of life, and defied temptation to assail him. He did not care to enter into any explanation that might put his conduct in a better light with his old friend. He had arrived at that pass when the world's opinion on his conduct was not of moment to him. Presently there must follow another reaction that would save him, or he would sink away from Right altogether, with only an honest heart or two to mourn his fall.

Mr. Pike essayed to speak, but Neal checked him.

"Come with me, if you will," he said, "watch my actions, if it please you, but—do not preach. I cannot bear a sermon to-night."

"Oh! Neal, how changed you are!"

"I tried to be a rock and resist all change. See the mistake that I have made!"

"I can't make you out. You are incomprehensible," Mr. Pike wailed forth feebly.

"I am an enigma not worth the trouble of solving, sir," said Neal, touched by the sorrow in Mr. Pike's voice; "there, let me advise you to part with me here—or let the cab take you home and leave me to walk. You will think worse of me than I deserve, if you go further."

"No, Neal—I will accompany you."

Neal gave up further attempt to dissuade Pike from his intention.

"As you will."

The cab rattled through the London streets, where the shops were not all closed yet, and across Westminster Bridge. Mr. Pike looked from the window once or twice as the cab made its way down narrow turnings and confused him as to locality.

"Do you come hither very often, Neal?" he asked.

But Neal did not answer him, and he repeated not his question.

In a narrow, grimy street the cab drew up before the entrance of some dancing-rooms—Pike guessed that from the music welling forth into the night.

"Here?" he asked vacantly.

"Here."

Men and women were hanging about the doors, jostling each other on the steps, well-dressed men and women, whose meaningless laughter jarred upon the nerves of the dissenter. Cabs were rattling towards them, and forming into line, setting down a host of jaded *roués*, who lounged towards the vortex, and a few of whom, with disordered white cravats, had been staying late over dessert, and had wandered hitherwards for fresh excitement; there was a rustle of silk upon the stairs and in the streets, and Vice in holiday garb, and with rouged cheeks, flitted everywhere.

"Neal," gasped Mr. Pike, laying his hand upon our hero's shoulder—alas! our hero—but Neal shook his hand away, and entered, paying his fee, an action imitated by him who played the part of Mentor to so little purpose.

Into a brilliantly lighted room of considerable extent, at the end of which was a raised orchestra, full of staid-looking musicians in evening dress. The room itself was full of light, life, and colour—all was a bewilderment to Pike, and all took time to comprehend. He knew that he was in some sinful

haunt, where money was freely spent, and vice was patronized—where people throve by vice, and looked down upon struggling virtue—where there was just a fair semblance of propriety, for the sake of outward show and future licences. Pike looked round him, and on all sides of him, for one honest face, and failed to see it in the crowd; there were folly and cupidity amongst the men, and bravado, set desperation, smirking apathy, amongst the women—but there was nothing good, or that had a trace of good, perceptible in that place. And amidst it all, whilst the musicians paused, and the crowd surged to and fro, there prowled a little Jewish man, with his hat on the back of his head, and his hands jingling loose silver in his pockets—a wretched fellow, who fattened in this den, and profited by the viciousness of humankind. Restless as an evil genius, he crawled from the ball-room to the gallery, from the gallery to the refreshment-room, a personification of the devil himself, seeking whom he might devour. He bowed to all liberal patrons, and exchanged a friendly nod with faces that he knew—with Neal's amongst the rest.

"Here he is again!" was whispered more than

once concerning Neal—"the dumb man of Miller Street—the man with something on his mind!"

Neal paid a further fee, and went into the gallery that skirted three sides of the room, Pike still following him. When he was seated, and the music had pealed forth again, when the mad dance had begun below, and conversation fast and furious as the dance was proceeding on all sides of him, Pike found breath to speak.

"Oh! Neal—I did not think so bad of you as this!"

"Think what you please."

"What pleasure can *you* take amongst such men—and, my God, such women as these! You whom I have always thought sober-judging and temperate-living."

"I watch life here."

"Life verging on moral death—where is the lesson worth learning in a place like this?"

"There are valuable lessons to be learned everywhere, if one has the courage to pursue them. I do not shrink."

"Mad!—mad!" moaned Mr. Pike.

Neal started. There were times when he believed that he was going mad himself, so difficult

in his own mind even was it to reconcile his actions with common sense. Was he like his father, after all—was he too weak to bear the shock that had desolated home, and blasted every bud of promise?

"Neal, you must come home. You must quit this place; I can't bear to leave you here—and I can't stop."

"Pray do not expose yourself to any inconvenience on my account," said Neal coolly, "I am more used to this life than you are."

"Do you make your wife's sin the poor excuse for facing such a life and becoming merged in it?"

"Hush!—don't speak of my wife here! She may hear you!"

"She!—is she here, then?" and Pike cast a startled glance over his shoulder.

"She is coming!"

"I hope not."

"Her life must end in places like this, and I am waiting for the end."

"Come home, for your soul's sake."

"Not yet, Mr. Pike."

"Then you and I must part."

"Good evening," said Neal.

"We must part for ever, Neal, if this be the road you are bent on pursuing, and you will not listen to my counsel. I—I did think," he added, with a faltering voice, "that I had a little influence over you until to-night, and that you listened to me now and then, and did not deliberately seek evil company, after this fashion. But you defy me; you take pleasure, and only pleasure, in these places, and you are not fit for me or my purer life. From to-night you must choose between your best friend—I think your best, Neal—and the evil thoughts which rebel against God's will. Which is it to be?"

"I am not called upon to make a choice, and I decline an answer."

"Then I must wish you good-bye," said Pike, with evident excitement; "I shall never see you again. I give you up as incurable!"

Neal shrugged his shoulders.

"If you will not think of yourself, or your future—think of your old father, whose disgrace will be yours, and whose pride is only in you, Neal. Will you do this?"

"Not now."

"Then, good-bye, Neal. I am sorry—very,

very sorry—that you value this society before my love for you. God help you, for I can't!"

Mr. Pike started from the seat, and pushed his way towards the staircase. He could bear no more—he must give Neal up from that night. The place was becoming more crowded every instant—people from theatres and supper-rooms were hastening hither, and jostling one another on the stairs—the devil jingled more merrily the silver in his pockets, even the great chandeliers seemed to sparkle more brightly with this influx of business, and the musicians played heavenly music to the earthlings with a greater spirit. Pike gave one heavy sob as he tore himself into the street, and a woman burst into a hideous laugh as he hustled past her.

"Drunk, Jenny, as a lord!" she cried, to her companion.

She understood the symptoms; she had been often "crying drunk" herself—only drunken people betrayed emotion in that gaudy hell.

Mr. Pike ran along the street, paying no heed to proffered cabs. He was very heart-sick, very heart-broken. It had been a struggle to resign Neal, to leave him there—but Neal had confessed

his acquaintance with, and his liking for, that life, and Pike felt that all was over between them after that avowal.

He was thinking so, when an arm was thrust through his, and he was walked on at a pace more rapid than he had hitherto adopted.

"There—I am with you! After all, Pike, I can't afford to lose *you!*"

"God bless you, Neal!—God bless you!" said Mr. Pike, struggling to keep the tears from his eyes. "I am so glad!"

"I am not worthy of this friendship," said Neal, "but I will try and respect it, if you'll let me. You have warned me, and I see my danger—I will make one effort to be good. But oh! Pike, if you could only understand how I loved that woman—and what a void in life she has left me!"

"Courage! Time!" said Pike.

"When I was most harsh, I thought that it was for her good—I had hope even then of seeing her a good wife, loving and trusting me. It has been a disappointment too hard to bear, and I gave way. But I *will* be stronger—there, I promise you!"

"Thank you. You must come and see me more often now. You will not seek"—with a shudder—"that life again?"

"I give it up."

"And you will come?"

"Well—if you wish it. But I shall make you very miserable by my grave looks—you and Miss Merton."

"And you will go home now—stronger, braver, better?"

"I will try to be all three—we must not let the old father go down to his grave with regret for me. You touched the right chords then, Pike—how they have been rusting!"

They shook hands and parted. Pike returned home in triumph to Hackney Road. To his surprise, Addie was sitting up for him.

"There, you must not scold me, uncle. But I was afraid that something had happened, and I could not rest."

"Something has happened, Addie," said Mr. Pike. "Neal has stepped back to his old self, from the brink of the gulf, where a good man might have been lost. He has sought comfort from the world, instead of from its Maker; but he

turns away at last. I am so happy to-night!—so very happy, Addie!"

Mr. Pike dropped into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. At home, he could give way and be less manlike—and the struggle had been a hard one with him!

"I don't know," he said, suddenly recovering, "why I should like that youth so much—but I feel in some way or other responsible for his better life. If he had only married you, instead of Miss Webber, as I hoped and prayed he would!"

"Oh! you did not hope that, uncle!" cried Addie.

"And—and he must not be tied all his life to an infamous woman now. Whilst she bears his name, he shares in her disgrace, and that has preyed upon him long enough."

Mr. Pike was off his guard that night, and betrayed too much. Addie's hand stole to her bosom as her cheeks paled suddenly.

"You must not think of Neal and me loving one another," she said quickly; "it can never be! I—I have never thought of him."

"Not of another—you too, Addie?"

Addie bowed her head, as he had done a moment since, and did not answer.

"Oh! Addie, is this true?"

"I have had no secrets from you until now; but I could not find the courage to tell you, and I hoped that you would guess it."

"How could I guess that you—that *you* would fall in love! Is it young Hedger, who went abroad the other day?"

"No."

"Will you tell me his name?"

"You will never forgive me!" she murmured; "it was so wrong to love him, and he never had one single thought of me. I tried not!"

"And this man's name?"

"Tressider!"

Mr. Pike gasped with affright. Was it possible? —that man, that wicked man, of all upon God's earth!

"Addie!—Addie!—how was this?"

"He was so friendless in the world, and my heart sorrowed for him. He was an orphan like myself; and oh! I saw much goodness in him, that only needed the right word, the right way, to flower forth. I tried not to think of him, and of

his poor life of pleasure and frivolity; but I could not shut my heart against him; and I knew that I loved him when he went wholly wrong!"

"But now, Addie, you must not tell me that for that villain there remains one spark of affection? You, whose whole life I have studied so intently?"

"The spark has vanished—I have a woman's pride. But——"

"But," repeated Mr. Pike.

"But you must not plan for Neal and me a life that cannot be. That would be the beginning of another error."

"I see!—I am silent!" murmured Mr. Pike; "but how strange it all is!—how very strange!"

The strangeness of it kept him sleepless throughout that early morning—the inconsistency of women's fancies—even good women like this sober little dissenter, whose history he thought he knew by heart till then. To think that that reckless, handsome spendthrift—a play-actor and a rake—should have ever won upon his innocent niece, whose staidness was his model and his pride! Yes,

it was very strange; and the future, looking at it steadily, did not seem to brighten very much for the only two he loved in all the world.

CHAPTER IV.

NEAL STARTS ON A JOURNEY.

NEAL GALBRAITH changed for the better. If he wore no brighter look, still there was less utter despondency; and he saw the duties lying before him in a different light. He chafed not at the inevitable, as though he had been the only sufferer undergoing the fiery ordeal of affliction; he bore his sorrow better, and he felt within himself that the worst was over.

If in his heart Neal still treasured his wrongs, he gave no voice to them, and he did not seek to dissipate them in the vortex from which Pike had rescued him. He knew no mercy—he would never know mercy, perhaps—on the sin which had cut him adrift from home ties; but he did not brood upon his loss, and he no longer considered himself justified in perilling his own soul, out of very

despair. He had been a good and thoughtful man—and he stepped back once more from his self-isolation to think of others, and to study others. He did not believe in any happiness falling to his share—not even in the long days ahead of him, when time should heal his wounds and bring him hopes once more; but he believed that he should have the power to do his duty in life, and wrong no man by his rashness.

He became the watchful and considerate son again to Mr. Galbraith, casting a new light on the latter days. He had the art of hiding away his one great loss almost, and he profited by the study of it, and made his father happier. He became the friend of Mr. Pike in earnest; for at last he knew what anxiety he had caused him.

He went with his father to Hackney Road; and if the meetings there were not merry ones, still they brought some comfort unto all, for they presaged the dawn of times less dark. Neal would even stray into Mr. Pike's warehouse—where business was always brisk, and contrasted so strangely with the old times, in Shad Thames—and feel, rather than feign, an interest in the business-life around him.

"You will settle down here after all, Neal," Mr. Pike would say, cheerfully; "you'll get on more bravely at your desk, with the old task-work to your hand."

"Don't press me yet a while to work—I shrink away from labour, as beyond my strength," said Neal. "I am like a man recovering from an illness, that has left him very weak and helpless."

"But who will grow stronger every day now."

"Who will try, at least?"

They were evenings of calm reunion after a while—when the summer had come, Neal used to look forward to them. Once a week at Pike's house—once a week Pike and his niece at Streatham—and the remaining days to think of the meetings that had been, and that were yet in store for him. He must be weak in mind to be solaced by so little, he thought ruefully sometimes; he wondered whether he should ever be really strong again, and able to take his place in the world. He began to appreciate the value of Addie Merton's society now that they were thrown together—to see how goods he was, and what skill she had in diverting

from their course the dark thoughts which now and then beset him in society.

Addie Merton had confessed to her uncle her inability to love Neal Galbraith, and now that there was no probability of being misunderstood, she set to work at the task of lightening Neal's sorrows. She had a ready tact, born of long practice, that assisted her; she was naturally of a cheerful temperament, and there was a practicalness in her style that gave a dead blow to "the horrors." She was matter-of-fact without being dull, and pious without being severe. One could wonder like Pike why she had ever fallen in love with Walter Tressider, if one did not know that to each life there falls some fragment of romance, creating heroes and heroines out of nothing. Addie was not a perfect woman, and was even now only eighteen years of age—and life before that age creates some brilliant fictions, even in the minds of staid dissent, that is taught to disregard them.

She could be a sister to Neal without being misunderstood now, she thought; Neal was not likely to misinterpret her actions, and she was sure that her uncle would not. She was sorry for Neal's mistake in life, and she strove very hard, when she

had recovered from the shock of his altered looks, to render the world less like a desert to him.

Meanwhile Mr. David Pike said nothing, but let her strive, and, like most men who are reticent, he thought the more. He thought of a new story in good time for all Addie's past avowals. Addie was a sensible girl, who would shake off her one fancy for an object that never deserved her, and see in Neal a better choice, a higher standard for a hero. He believed that there would come a day when Neal would soften too, and Pike was a man who had the courage to wait patiently. Meanwhile Neal was a married man, and he must watch carefully the different changes of his nature. Whilst Addie and Neal were simply acquaintances—something less than brother and sister—good would evolve from their companionship; but when he saw "a difference"—and he was watching keenly for it—he must set his interdict upon their meeting until Neal had taken steps to procure that divorce, which was, in this case, so readily obtainable.

It is a question whether Mr. Pike was not at fault here, for all his carefulness—for all the prosaic natures of those whom he made his study.

But Mr. Pike was a man who trusted implicitly in Neal, and Neal was not likely to abuse his confidence. Neither was Neal likely to fall in love suddenly and hastily with his friend's niece; he had had enough of love to last a life-time; he had begun and ended early. There were times when David Pike ventured to suggest that Neal should think of freeing his name from the woman who had disgraced it; and though Neal turned his stern self to the light at the hint, he did not wholly forbid now an intrusion on the subject.

"It matters not," said Neal; "I have no interest to serve, and I save myself the pain of publicity. I shall never marry again."

"Never's a long day, Neal," Mr. Pike would reply, with a sinking heart.

"You may trust me with that determination—I shall never regret that I have made it."

Mr. Pike felt no fear of Neal loving prematurely his niece after that—so the waters were still, if deep, and beyond there seemed no signs of their surface being disturbed.

It was summer-time at last—the middle of summer—bright July weather, when London is in its season, and the green lands at their brightest, that

a country newspaper found its way to Neal. The newspaper, a Nottingham journal, had been addressed to Fife Street—in a woman's handwriting, that he failed to recognize—and had travelled about town, becoming dogs-eared and dirty in its progress, scored by many postmasters, and at last reaching him at Streatham.

Neal read the paper through, and found no clue to the motive that had sent it to him. It perplexed him—it was, more or less, a sign from the days that he was trying to outlive. It might have been a jest—ill-timed and foolish—of some one who had had a faint recollection of his name and place of abode—and yet he doubted it. Looking at it, he could believe that something was intended by that paper, the mystery of which he had not solved yet. He knew nothing of Nottingham; he had never seen the place, or remembered to have spoken of it, or heard others speak; in the paper printed in that town, he could not see one line to interest him. There were local news of no importance; there were races in the course of the week; there were accounts of prices at Nottingham market, and of fights in Nottingham town; there was a run upon Nottingham lace, and more hands

wanted—a thousand hands, he saw by one advertisement; there was a theatre at Nottingham, and he looked carefully for the name of Raymond in the advertised list of "stars," and found it not; there had been a fire at Nottingham, and a man burned to death; there were ten advertisements at least from quacks, who had exhausted London credulity, and were striving hard for country connections; there were bullocks and sheep for sale, and doleful prophecies of the coming harvest; but there was nothing from the florid heading to the printer's name that had its interest for Neal.

Still he took the paper up twenty times that day, as though he would tire the mystery out of it, casting it at last aside, in despair of a solution to the mystery.

"What is it all about, Neal?"

"Local news, of no importance to us."

The old gentleman stooped, picked up the paper, and glanced down the first column.

"Why!—what's this!"

"Is it possible that you have found the reason for this paper being sent to me?"

"I don't know, Neal—it is not very likely—but

don't you remember that that man—Joe, they called him,—who came to Fife Street once, had joined a travelling circus?"

"I remember nothing of the kind. It is possible—well?"

"Here's an advertisement of Toppin's Circus—that was the name, I fancy—it will be at Nottingham in the race-week."

Neal took the paper from his father's hands, and read and re-read this advertisement. He had passed it twenty times, noticing the heading, and the time announced for an entry into Nottingham, without attributing thereto any connection between it and him. He could not believe now that it was for that reason this paper had been sent him—or that his father's memory was strong enough for minor facts like these. But Joe and his wife, he remembered, had been some time at Fife Street before his return home one night; his father had been annoyed and startled by their presence there, by the history of their antecedents, and the recapitulation of their pursuits; he had sat there a listener, disgusted with his daughter-in-law's relations, and he had not missed a word. Neal let the paper drop from his hands, to think more seriously

of this. A Nottingham paper forwarded to Fife Street by some one who knew not of his change of life; a circus to be erected at Nottingham in the race-week; Joe Webber connected with a circus; a remembrance of Mrs. Webber, thinking it probable that her daughter Carry was with Joe, and not with Tressider—so the fragments of a story pieced themselves together, and disturbed the thinker.

"When are the races?" Neal asked of his father, who had taken up the paper again.

"The 20th of July."

"That is to-morrow—Wednesday."

"But—but you don't think——"

"Patience—I have not had time to think, yet awhile."

Neal began to think in earnest after that assertion; he went fathoms deep into thought, which took him away from passing things and present life; the old look which had grown fainter in the latter days settled on his face again, furrowing and darkening. In the afternoon he went for a long walk, coming back still thoughtful, to lock himself in his study, and decline Mrs. Higgs's offers of refreshment. He had dined; he had had his tea;

his head ached, and when he had done writing, he should go to his room that night.

"What a madman I was to tell him about the circus!" whimpered Mr. Galbraith; "I knew that I had never got quite sane!"

"He'll wake up brisk again," said the sanguine Mrs. Higgs.

"I have been a trouble to him all his life," said the father; "if I had stopped at home that day, Carry and he might have made it up—and now I'm putting all kinds of foolish thoughts into his head again. I'm a miserable old muddler, Mrs. Higgs, and the sooner I'm comfortably buried the better for everybody."

"There, hold your tongue, sir, do!" reprimanded Mrs. Higgs. "It's the creeps you give me by your fretfulness."

"I feel," he added, in a whisper, "just as if something were going to happen. I'm sure it is!"

"Oh! good lor, let's get a light! What a man you are!"

Mrs. Higgs prepared to close the shutters on the deepening twilight, and to light the gas in the chandelier above their heads. It was not pleasant sitting in the dark, listening to the forebodings of

a weak old man. It made her superstitious against her will. She was glad to get to bed early, and to see Mr. Galbraith to his room. In the morning Neal would be more like himself, and the fears of something happening would be dissipated.

Early on that morning, when the house was light with a new day, and the clocks in the house were striking five, Neal turned the handle of his father's door, and entered the room softly.

"Oh! is that you, boy?" said Mr. Galbraith, quickly; "I'm not asleep."

"You wake too early, father," he said; "however, it is all the better this morning, for I can bid you good-bye now."

"Go—od—bye?"

Mr. Galbraith sat quickly up in bed, with his night-cap awry, and his hands clutching his knees.

"Why—what—what—what do you mean by 'Good-bye?'"

"Good-bye till to-morrow. That's not a very long farewell, is it, or one to grow sentimental concerning?"

"Where are you going?"

"To Nottingham Races. Just for a little change and a little pleasure. Do you blame me?"

"Not if it were for the change only; but oh! Neal—it isn't!"

Neal sat down at the side of his father's bed, and looked at his watch.

"I have scarcely a minute to spare, but you must understand that there is nothing to be alarmed at in this journey. That man Webber, who brought his wife to Fife Street, nineteen months ago, may know what has become of *her!*"

"What does it matter now?"

"I am interested in her fate—that's all."

"If you should see her?—if she should be with those people?"

"It could make no difference to me. I am ever apart from her."

"Then why go?"

"I am curious. I am haunted by a voice that urges me to action. I must find Joseph Webber, if I can."

"I will not try to persuade you to stay," said Mr. Galbraith; "it's best, perhaps—I don't know. I can't think, just at present. You'll take care of yourself, and don't jump out of the train before it stops; and mind the horses on the course; and—

and *don't* be later than to-morrow—there's a dear boy!"

Neal left with these injunctions in his ears. He went along the landing to Mrs. Higgs's door, at which he knocked.

"Who's there?"

"I, Neal. I am going to Nottingham—see after my father till I return."

"Not——"

Neal heard no more. He had hastened downstairs, and from the house; he was walking rapidly down Brixton Hill a few minutes afterwards. He had a long way to walk before a conveyance could be procured to take him to King's Cross; but the train did not leave till six o'clock—a special train for the race day—and he should reach Kennington in little more than half an hour. He walked rapidly—the current of his thoughts was rapid too, and seemed to help him onwards. Why was he going?—was it only curiosity?—was there any hope, or any fear, that urged him on his way?—hope that she was not wholly bad, that she had repented, and was trying to live honestly with her brother?—that she had never gone with Tressider?—fear that she was dying, dead; that there was

something blacker still against her, and it would meet him full front amidst the crowd of pleasure-seekers? There was a cab at Kennington that took him to the railway station, where there were life and bustle enough that early morning. All the black-legs, all the betting-men, all the three-card shufflers, all the heterogeneous mass of nondescripts who live by racing, all the thieves that London could afford for an entertainment so many miles distant, were assembled at King's Cross. It was a *bonâ fide* sporting train, for the accommodation of those who wished to reach Nottingham before the race, and Neal saw few people near him without rapacious faces, and eager, hungry eyes.

He was in the train and being rattled on to Nottingham at last. He could almost imagine that he was in a dream still, prosecuting one of those vague, purposeless journeys more common to dream-land than to life. The laughter in his ears; the sudden altercations that arose about old bets, new horses, jockeys, everything appertaining to the turf, from the betting-men who filled the carriage; the oily way in which the oaths flowed forth, and the strength of the adjectives which preceded every personality, were scarcely recon-

cilable with any life that Neal had known.

It was a long journey, and insufferably wearisome. The sporting men eyed Neal with suspicion; and when he betrayed no sign of satisfaction at the first coarse anecdote indulged in, that suspicion verged into positive dislike. Neal closed his eyes and feigned to sleep, to avoid being dragged into the general conversation, and when a few remarks had been made upon his stolidity, general appearance, and want of sociability, there was a run upon oaths and horses again that lasted all the way to Peterborough.

Neal escaped at Peterborough into another compartment, but he passed from bad to worse, and lived to repent the transfer. Two more betting-men and three rakish individuals with white hats, who looked like betting-men, were Neal's companions for the remainder of the journey—the white-hatted fraternity producing cards immediately the train had started, and suggesting a quiet game at whist, for stakes of a merely nominal character. Neal was in no mood for whist, and declined to take a hand, declined to be interested in the cards, which were offered for his inspection, as a capital sample of a new pattern introduced from

Paris; declined to watch the progress of a little game with two diamonds and the king of spades; and was dead to all inducements to lay a single penny upon the whereabouts of his majesty, though he was on the knee of the gentleman opposite, who had kindly bent the corner of the card so that Neal should make quite sure of winning.

Neal was looked upon once more with suspicion, was once more freely criticized directly he closed his eyes. When would it be Nottingham, and he clear of this den of thieves? Had it not been folly to come hither at all, on the mere supposition of a newspaper advertisement affecting him in some remote degree? Would it be a satisfaction to him to know that his wife had not eloped with Tressider, or had lived all these long months with her disreputable brother? In either case what could result from this long journey?—what could he learn that would add one moment's peace to the future, wherein he had promised himself to be more humble in his suffering.

At Nottingham at last, and harassed by a dozen fly-drivers, Nottingham fly-drivers, with sunken eyes and high cheek bones, and altogether pugilistic in appearance.

"Where's Toppin's Circus?"

"Who's?"

Neal repeated the question, and the man asked "Who's?" again, with a fierceness of aspect as though scenting a joke against his self-respect. Neal produced the newspaper which he had brought with him from London, and pointed to the advertisement. The man leaned his hands on Neal's shoulder whilst he looked at the paper—a friend, interested therein, came and leaned on the flyman's shoulder—a third, facetiously inclined, pushed against all three, and stopped the further progress of a railway porter with a barrow. Hereupon an altercation ensued in the Nottingham dialect, and allusions to punching heads were freely bandied.

"Drive to the race-course," said Neal, resolving to search for the circus on his own account; and a few minutes afterwards he was being bumped and jolted through the Nottingham streets, amongst carts, and omnibuses, and flys, with two or three ragged beings brandishing cards of the races through the open windows.

A busy town, with signs of a general holiday at every corner, the Nottingham roughs gathering in force, and the lace-makers in their Sunday's best

streaming towards the one centre of attraction, laughing and romping by the way.

Set down at the gates beyond the town leading to the race-course, and passing through them towards higher ground, where the canvas roofs of booths were seen, Neal began his strange quest. The sandy soil on which the course was situated, the sandy hills sloping down towards the course, the sandy paths meandering right and left and straight-ahead, gave a desert aspect to the place, and threatened ophthalmy when the crowd thickened, and the wind came fresher from the hills beyond. The dust was rising from the carriage-road, and the tents on the higher ground loomed through a sandy fog, that would be denser presently.

Neal made his way towards the booths—long rows of drinking booths—long rows of fighting booths, with fancy portraits of men in sparring attitudes outside the doors—a booth for dancing after race hours—and then more sparring booths—and more booths devoted to illimitable drinking. The high-cheeked, keen-eyed sons of Nottingham were thick here—they were prepared for any amount of quarrelling, and were already indulging in any amount of swearing—the oaths were thicker than

the dust, which was fast settling on coats and hats, hair and whiskers, rendering mankind one gritty pattern.

Neal found the circus at last, lying a little apart from the straggling rows of fighting booths, a forest of scaffolding at present, with a dozen men hard at work setting up the canvas, nailing up flaming pictures of wild horses, highly-educated horses, male riders in fleshings, and women in short skirts; the whole surrounded by a crowd of holiday folk, interested in the proceedings, and swearing fluently at everything.

Neal forced his way to the front, not without opposition and a hundred oaths hurled at him for his haste, and touched the arm of a man superintending the finishing process—a burly man, with a thick black moustache, on which the dust had settled.

"This is Toppin's Circus, I presume?"

"Yes, sir," replied the gentleman addressed, after a critical survey of Neal's general appearance.

"Advertised in the Nottingham papers to appear here during the race week?"

"Exactly so."

"I have come from London in search of it."

"All the way from London to see us!" exclaimed the gentleman addressed; "to see the circus—really!"

"Not for the entertainment's sake—but to find one of your company."

"Oh! he's gone!"

This was a little premature, and Toppin—for it was Toppin himself upon whom Neal Galbraith had intruded—thought so himself the moment afterwards. But Toppin had scented danger to some improvident money-borrowing member of his community, and this was a gala-day, in which no one could be spared.

"At least, I daresay he has," Toppin corrected; "we change and change about our company, and there's nothing like variety. Who's the man you want?"

"A man whom I will pay well for any information that he can give me concerning—his sister; a man named Joseph Webber."

"Oh! he's in——"

"He's in Nottingham, and I must see him for a minute or two. If I rob you of his services for a short while, you must tell me what they're worth."

"Hum—well, a man's worth half a guinea to

me now—for we're behind time, and shall ring in at half-past twelve."

Neal tendered the money, which Mr. Toppin took with an airy blessing on the donor.

"You'll not keep him long, I hope, sir—we don't call him Webber in the troop. Hi! Jack—see if you can find Signor Delavanti in any of the caravans, and tell him that I want him."

CHAPTER V.

WAITING.

JOSEPH WEBBER, *alias* Signor Delavanti, was some time making his appearance. Neal began to grow suspicious of the delay; a circus was built in, and fit for use whilst he waited —"Toppin's Far-famed Circus!" as announced by the painted canvas flapping overhead in the wind, that was blowing more freshly every hour.

When Neal was thinking of a search for Mr. Toppin again, with the idea of seeking information as to the exact locality of Mr. Webber's habitation, Joe suddenly appeared at his side.

"I'm told, sir, that you—why, it's Galbraith!"

Joe was fairly surprised; he was not actor enough to feign this complete bewilderment. He backed some paces, keeping his hands in his pockets, and his shoulders raised above his ears, after that slouching style peculiar to Joe.

"Yes. Did you not expect me?"

"Who—you?"

"Did you not send me a newspaper, containing an advertisement of this circus's arrival in Nottingham?"

"Upon my soul, I didn't!"

Joe was embarrassed—but for once, at least, it was evident that he was truthful. He stood shuffling up the sand at his feet, deliberating as to the wisest course to pursue; there was something puzzling to Joe in Neal Galbraith's propinquity.

"I have come a long journey to ask you a few questions."

"I'm not bound to answer them, without I like," said Joe, suddenly assuming a dogged demeanour.

"Yes, you are."

"I don't see who's to make me!" replied Joe, still defiantly; "least of all, I don't fancy that it's likely to be *you!*"

"I'll pay you for your trouble."

"Curse your pay, sir! I can earn my bread without your charity!" said Joe. "You're no friend of mine now! I could have cut your throat twelve months ago, and swung for it!"

The worst side of Joe's character—or the best, which was it?—seemed apparent at this juncture. Neal regarded him steadily—was even prepared to resist that sudden attack, which the small, fierce eyes threatened.

"You and I have no cause to be friends! You needn't come sponging here for information. You've had your way, and got rid of your wife without a penny to pay for it! Why, she was too good for you!"

"What has become of her?" asked Neal.

"What do you want to know for?" rejoined Joe.

"Is she with you?"

"Will you take her back if she is?"

"Back!" cried Neal—"take back a woman who left my house of her own free will nineteen months ago! Do ycu think that I'm a madman?"

"What do you want here, may I ask again?" said Joe.

"I would know that woman's fate; if she be here with you, and struggling for a better life, ask what you will of me for her support."

Joe relapsed into a thoughtful mood again; his hands seemed to thrust themselves deeper into his

trousers pockets, and his feet to kick up, slowly and deliberately, a pile of sand over Neal's boots and his own. He was thinking still, when a man came rushing from the circus towards him.

"What! ain't yer dressed yet!—who's going to wait for you, do you think?—who's going on after Toppin's daughter?—who's allers going to be put fust, before the people come in? Toppin's in a fine rage, I can tell you—and there's the band outside already!"

Sure enough the brass band of Toppin's establishment burst forth at this juncture, and a rush of the mob in the vicinity was made in its direction. Here was something to see before the race-bell rang.

"If you want anything more to say to me," said Joe—"if you've got anything to propose, or want to hear anything, you'd better come to that caravan at ten o'clock to-night—that green-bodied affair yonder, where the dog's chained to the hind wheels."

"I ask you now——"

"I've my living to get, Mr. Galbraith," said Joe, with sullen dignity, "and Toppin don't think twice about giving a man the sack. You can

come or stop away, just as it pleases you—I shall be there at ten."

"I will come."

Whether Joe Webber heard him or not, was not apparent. Joe had walked away rapidly towards the caravan that he had pointed out—time was against him, and he had fleshings and spangles to put on—and Neal watched him run up the caravan steps, open the door, and enter, leaving the dog whining after him, heart-broken for lack of patronage.

Neal turned away to think of the interview that he had had with this man, and to wonder for awhile at the new demeanour of Joe Webber. Neal smiled grimly at the idea of Joe asserting any dignity, at that mountebank judging the story in a different manner, and seeing faults in *him!* "He had been bitterly deceived—cruelly disgraced," thought Neal, as he wandered down the sand-banks listlessly, "and this man's defence of his sister—subdued though it had been—was a burlesque of sentiment!"

"You've got rid of your wife without a penny to pay for it!" It was a sharp taunt, but what did it matter, after all? What was the woman to him

now, or what claim had she upon him after her flight? There was no explanation of her conduct that would be accepted as a fair defence by the world, or by himself. There might be something to pity; but there was not anything in her story that his pride could forgive, he felt assured. Even that story he did not care to hear, he thought —if she were with her brother, or her brother could prove to him that she was attempting to live honestly, why, he was prepared to assist her with his money; but to see her, or speak to her again, never, so help his God!

He uttered that oath—fearful and impotent—in the broad day; he was in no mood for forgiveness; curiosity after all, a sense of wrong that nothing could set right, a whim that he had not the power to resist, had brought him to Nottingham—nothing of the old fond love which had led the boy into marriage. *That* had been the fault of a life, and it could never be atoned for by the bitter sorrow, to which years would not bring assuagement. In the last course of action, which had ended in Carry's flight from home, he might not have acted wisely—he guessed how foolishly, at times—but in her retaliation for his

error, what an awful, soul-destroying vengeance! No, there was no pardon for it—he had not come to offer pardon!

Neal wandered about all day on the race-grounds. How the day was spent he never knew, although it seemed as if the holiday would never end, and there would be racing till the judgment. It was all a something more distant from reality than even dream-land now; he wandered to and fro, scarcely realizing the scene, and yet beset by one thought that he might be going mad at last, and this was the first stage. He tried more than once to shake the thoughts away, and mix with the surging, swaying crowd about him—be one of the people bent upon enjoyment; but the dead apathy overtook him before the resolution was five minutes old, and he was groping on his way again, and praying that the night would come. The people rushed against him now and then, and swore at him for being in the way; he was conscious of being hemmed in by a crowd of faces interested in some charlatan, then of standing by the rails, packed in with more blaspheming men, and brazen-faced women, who shrieked with laughter at the blasphemy; then of being just

conscious of some horses dashing past, a bell ringing, and of a roar of voices shouting out the winner; he found himself paying money at the Grand Stand, with an instinctive desire to escape the crowd and dust; then he was toiling up a staircase as though he were an old man, and taking a seat at the back of a large room, where people were devouring dinners of lukewarm salmon, and shouting out for cucumber. He sat there till the waiters fell over his feet, and politely requested him to move a little further; he became conscious of being in the way of business, and strolled listlessly through a side-door, to be ushered out again, with an intimation, not too polite, that that was the Earl of Romford's party, and his company was not required there. He found himself on the balcony, looking over the betting ring, with a man in a white hat, endeavouring to engage him in conversation; he broke away from him, and was warned from a second intrusion on a side balcony by a label, informing the world that the Marquis of Battersea had his particular party in that corner, and required no interference from the *canaille*, and though the Marquis of Battersea's party did not appear too select—especially amongst its feminine

constituents—Neal respected the warning, and wandered into ground less holy. He was at a bar struggling for brandy after that; he had felt suddenly faint, and was beset with a fear of dropping senseless there, with no one to claim him; and the brandy once secured, he seemed to recover from his stupor for awhile.

He found himself ascending more stairs, and resting on a dusty zinc-covered roof, which had not been much patronized that day, owing to the keenness of the easterly wind, that rendered too much air unpleasant. He rested and tried to collect his thoughts—to make quite sure of the object that had brought him to Nottingham, and of the end of that journey coming with the night. When he had mastered these thoughts—or believed that he had mastered them—when he was shuddering with cold, and grateful for the sun looking westwardly inclined, he went downstairs and out of the Grand Stand, into the noise and sand-mist. He toiled up the sand-hills towards the booths once more, and watched the drinking and the fighting, pushing his way in and out of crowds, and finally betaking himself to Toppin's Circus, where a brisk business was doing; men, women, and children streaming up

the steps, and Toppin rapping at the canvas with his cane, and expatiating on the merits of his entertainment.

Having made certain that the circus was in existence still, the caravan there, the dog still chafing at the wheel, Neal went away again—far away from the course at a rapid pace, into the country, as though he would reach the hills by which the view was bounded—green hills, that must have made a fair feature in a landscape before the factory shafts had shot up in their midst. Neal wandered away from the dust and turmoil, and returned not until the twilight; the race was over; there were a few people strolling about the course; the stand was empty of all parties—aristocratic and otherwise; there were streams of townsfolk making for home, and the dust rose more heavily than ever beneath their receding steps. They were lighting up the drinking and dancing booths; they were burning fatty compositions in huge receivers at the fighting tents; those who remained behind to make a night of it, were the dross of the factory hands—the refuse of the great town a mile away. The policemen looked like men who knew a busier time was coming for them than they had had all day,

and the men remaining on the open ground swore twice as fast to make up for the diminution in their numbers. There was high revelry in Nottingham, for a people's race day there is like no other race day in all England.

When it was dark night, when the wind had risen more, and the dust was blown about too thickly to see the stars overhead, Neal shook off his stupor by degrees. As the time approached for his meeting with Joe Webber, his clearer, sterner self came back; presently he should know what had become of his wife—what she had been doing perhaps all that long time wherein they had been apart? If she had not been with Tressider—never with Tressider—he should feel happier in mind, and less disgraced; he prayed that Joe might know all, at least—and would tell all. He would humour the mountebank for the whole truth—bribe him with money to confess it.

Neal went into the most reputable of all the disreputable booths, and had more brandy—with biscuits this time, which he ate in a corner of the tent, with a knot of young women in fancy hats laughing with a knot of young blackguards in fancy waistcoats at a table near him. They were laugh-

ing at him, but he paid no heed to them; one man hinted that he could fight him, and shouted out a defiance "to try it on," as Neal rose to withdraw, and then the laughter of that drinking-place was exchanged for the dust and darkness without. It was a wild scene at night, with figures flitting up and down the sand-hills, and little knots of people here and there; with the watchful police hovering about, and the flare of lights from the tents on higher ground. There were drunken men upon the slopes, and others a trifle less drunk stumbling over them; a fight here and there, increasing now and then to a grand *mêlée*, when the police charged in their midst, and might have made matters clearer by their interference, although to an observer it did not readily appear so. Nine o'clock by Neal's watch—only one more hour to wait, and then this night's business to begin!

CHAPTER VI.

A HARD STRUGGLE.

DURING the last hour that Neal kept watch, the numbers thinned apace; the last batch of pleasure-seekers turned from Toppin's Circus; there were a few stragglers of the worst description lingering amongst the booths still, but respectability had gone to Nottingham, and "the children of night" remaining there were worthy of their sinister paternity.

Neal Galbraith patrolled in the vicinity of the caravan which Joseph Webber had indicated to him early in the day and which lay a few paces beyond the dimly-lighted booths, where the grass struggled with better results amidst the sandy soil. There was a light glimmering from the window of the caravan, and the shadow of some one within crossed and recrossed continually; there was a fire, too, for smoke was ascending from the zinc chim-

ney in the roof; preparations for supper probably, for the dog, still a prisoner at the wheel, sniffed and whined piteously. It would soon be ten o'clock now, thought Neal, and, after all, what good could result from his patience, his long journey, and weary vigils; from a man of Joseph Webber's stamp, what satisfactory explanations, under any circumstances, could be satisfactory to *him?*

Before it was ten by his watch, the window of the caravan had opened, and a plateful of bones had been tilted out to the dog—and a man who looked like Webber in the darkness had suddenly emerged from the background, tapped at the door, and been admitted. After that, all silent, until the hour of meeting came at length, and Neal, anxious to end what little mystery there might be, walked towards the caravan. The dog left off its bones to bark at him as he went up the steps and knocked upon the panels of the door; there were some hasty movements within the place before some one called to him "Who's there?"

"Mr. Galbraith," answered Neal.

"Mr. Galbraith is welcome," said a woman's

voice. The door was opened, and the tall figure of Mrs. Webber stood in the aperture, with a hand extended to him.

Neal shook hands with her instinctively, and entered the caravan, the door of which was closed behind him.

A low, close room, the atmosphere of which was not pleasant to inhale, laden with mephitic vapours, and not entirely free from smoke that oozed its way through a crevice in the chimney which passed from the little stove up the centre of the room and through the roof. A den, rather than a habitation for human beings, with its space curtailed still more by a curtain that was slung across the caravan, and concealed one end from view. There was a table covered with a scanty supper cloth pushed into the opposite corner, and without much respect to sundry stage properties on which the legs were standing; there was Joe Webber, exhausted with his day's work, sitting in his shirt sleeves close to the fire-place, with his knees against the bars, and a short pipe in his mouth; and there was the giantess dropping on to a stool near her husband, and staring up at Neal after he had closed the door behind him.

"Will you take that chair, sir?" said she; "stools are more comfortable for me, in cribs like this, and saves me knocking my head about so much. We're glad to see you—it's better late than never!"

Neal glanced at the curtain as at something that might hide a mystery behind it, and then sat down with his back towards it.

"There's nothing there that'll hurt you much, sir," said Mrs. Webber, adverting to his glance; "that's only our second room—Joe calls it the bood-door when he's in good spirits—which he ain't to-night."

"I'm tired, girl," said Joe, restlessly; "I've been worked to death, and had no time to eat or drink till now."

"And now there hasn't been quite drink enough," added Selina, with a sigh, "but praps that's all the better, Joe, to-night."

"Perhaps it is," said Joe, shaking himself, as though he would make an effort to shake off his dulness, "now we're favoured with such company."

"I am here at your bidding," said Neal; "will you tell me all you know about—your sister?"

"She can tell you best," said Joe; "I've been *jawing* enough to-day, I think. She knows more than I, for that matter—and I've no hand in this. It goes against my grain a bit to see you here."

"Why should you bear me malice?—have I ever injured you?"

"I don't know but what you have—but I don't care to argue. *She*," taking his pipe from his mouth to indicate his wife with the stem, "can talk to you by the hour together—if she likes! This isn't my doing—let her work it out."

"I ain't afraid—I ain't nothing to be ashamed on, Joe."

"No, that's true—did I say you had, girl?"

And with this interrogative, Joe put his pipe in his mouth again, and screwed himself more apart from conversation. The giantess settled herself more firmly on the stool, clasped her large bony hands in her lap, and looked up with her wan, lined face at Neal—a face that trouble and a struggle for bread had scored more deeply than her years deserved. This thought, which might have crossed Neal's mind for an instant, it was strange to find re-echoed by the woman.

"You're looking old enough, Mr. Galbraith."

"I have not grown young lately."

"Worrited by business, praps?"

"No."

"Worrited by that which upset more than you —and even troubled *him*," pointing to the tired acrobat at the stifling fire.

"Very likely. Will you tell me anything or not?" Neal, said impatiently; "I cannot stay here —or breathe here long."

"It's the fust coming in and the coke—but you'll soon get used to it. I never has my health better than when I am jogging about the country in this fashion; but I was born in one, like—like many other conjurers' children," she added after a sudden pause.

Neal did not answer. Perhaps a studied silence to this woman's rambling would more quickly bring round the subject for which he had travelled, and had watched all day.

The giantess was silent after this for awhile; she looked at Joe, at Neal, over Neal's head at the checked shawl doing duty as a curtain, up at the wooden roof, cracked in many places, and black-

ened by foul air. Finding her theme in one or another of these, she began again.

"You came here to know about your wife—what made you think, sir, that we could tell you anything?"

"A newspaper sent by post to me from Nottingham."

"I thought that might remind you of us—I sent that."

"I suspected it."

"Without Joe's knowledge—or the knowledge of anybody for that matter; entirely my own idea that was, and *he*," pointing to Joe again, "knowed nothing of it until he came back from seeing you this morning."

"Then she told me," muttered Joe.

"Then I told him, because he was put out about seeing you, and couldn't understand it. And Joe's a man that likes to know everything."

"And don't like," added Joe, "that you should keep a fellow in the dark. It isn't what I've done for you since we've been married—though it was a mercenary match enough."

"I don't think it was, sometimes, Joe," said

Selina, with a laugh, to which Joe did not seem inclined to respond.

He was as anxious as Neal that this interview should terminate.

"You'll understand that I didn't quite expect you here," said the giantess, "but that I fancied there was just a chance that you would come."

"What did you want with me?"

"Well," she replied in a hesitating manner, "I hardly—know—exactly. I thought that praps it was just possible, that if I could tell you where your wife was, and what she was doing, you might be sorry for your quarrel, and——"

"Say no more," said Neal, more sternly; "I am not sorry—I have been grievously wronged—there was no excuse for that mad woman's flight."

"I don't defend her, do I?" said the giantess; "I wouldn't have done the same to Joe for all the world—I told her so many and many a time, and that it wasn't in her sober senses that she did it. But still, it didn't seem to me—an ignorant woman, with no fine notions, certainly—that it mightn't be patched up atween you. She came to us in February, because——"

"And left my house in January!" quickly added Neal; "don't explain her conduct; it is beyond any explanation that my wounded pride could ever accept. She came to you at last—well?"

"She told Joe all, and said that we was her only friends. Joe wasn't the man to turn his back upon his sister, for she'd been kind to him, oh! heaps of times, and they two—odd uns, certainly—knew each other's ways better than anybody else did. I wasn't against it either, for she came in wretched and forlorn enough, and I'm a woman easily touched, you see. She stayed with us some months; she got a place as shopwoman for awhile, and then came to us again; then she got another place."

"Where is she now?"

"Does that matter to you, who are so hard?" asked Mrs. Webber; "I allers said to Joe that I didn't like your face much—that it was a heavy one, and you wouldn't forgive in a hurry."

"There are some offences which it is not honourable to forgive—her's was one. But——"

"But what?"

"But I would help her, if she be poor and trying to live honestly—I would bid you tell her that her

father's house is open to her, and her father anxious for her coming home."

"What's that?" exclaimed Joseph Webber.

Neal repeated his words, adding,

"If she go back to her father's home—the fitting place for one who has repented of her error—I will allow her a fair income, so long as she lives honestly."

"What do you keep talking of her honesty for?" cried Joe Webber, dashing his pipe into the grate, where it split into fragments; "I'd lay my life she's as honest as you are!"

"She left my house," said Neal.

He knew no excuse for that. For all but that there was forgiveness, perhaps, but to desert him —never!

"Because you didn't believe her—because you held her down, and told her of your hate; do you think that I don't know this story?"

"She left my house," repeated Neal, gloomily.

"*You* come here with your talk of money for her!" cried Joe, more passionately—"why, I haven't any more spirit than money myself, but I wouldn't take a penny of you for her support—not I! You threw her off for some one else—you married

her, and got tired of her—you made her life a misery, and think to pay her money will make her that much happier, and ease your conscience so much more. So far as I have a word in it, you may keep your money, and we'll starve together, the lot of us, before we'll ask it from you!"

"No, that's not sense," said the giantess, shaking her head; "it sounds very well—it's like the people talk on the stage—but it isn't like life, and it's very unlike you, Joe."

"I mean it!" cried Joe Webber.

Joe's manner proved the truth of his assertions just at that instant; but then Joe was not like himself, but a man verging closer upon heroism than he had ever bargained for—and Joe had been very fond of Carry.

"I don't say, Joe, that you don't," replied his wife, more cool and practical; "but you must think for Carry too, Joe. There come times—winter times generally—when we can't afford to keep ourselves, and she shares misery with us instead of home. Then a little money, Joe, is like a something out of heaven, to make us all bear up together better. And when I sent that paper to you, Mr. Galbraith, it just struck me that you

might be glad to know your wife was with us, and that no thoughts of that man you were jealous of had anything to do with her going away from you."

"You cannot assure me of that any more than she could—only the Almighty knows beside herself with what intention she went away—whether she was disappointed in her first madness, and came on to you, or whether it was repentance after guilt, or what, I do not know—I will not seek to know. I have learned to be content with desolation; what lesson she has learned is of no interest to me."

"Ah! I see how hard you are," said the giantess; "you may be right enough in your ideas, and there ain't many that would take my side. I—I don't stand up for her myself, for I wouldn't have done it, as I've said over and over again; but I think if you had given way earlier—much earlier—it mightn't have all ended in this style."

"A life's folly, to be rectified when life is everlasting—not here."

"So be it, then. Now, what money will you leave to help this woman you will never forgive?—who hasn't asked your forgiveness, but might be

the better for it, for all that. Can you trust me, do you think, with money for your wife?"

"For the wife I had once," corrected Neal; "yes —I will trust you. I will leave with you five-and-twenty pounds, and you may tell her from me that with every quarter, when I am assured of her well-doing, I will send the same amount—more, if it be required."

Joe stared hard at the speaker—the giantess drew in her breath, and clasped her hands more tightly. Twenty-five pounds a quarter!—was it possible? Where did the money come from? In what way had this man become suddenly rich, to talk of large, almost incalculable sums in that way?

"Tell her from me, also, that I am learning to be resigned to the disgrace she has brought upon me that I have fought hard for that resignation, and it must not, shall not be disturbed! From her I never wish to hear directly. You understand me?"

"Yes."

"When I have paid you this money," he said, drawing out his purse, "I shall have done all that is necessary, and can return to London. My address I will also give you, and—*what's this!*"

To Neal's amazement, from some unknown quarter, as from a new world, there stood by his side a little child—dark-eyed, dark-haired—an ill-clad, rosy-faced, tottering child, that clung to his knees for support, and stretched out one tiny hand towards the purse he held. It had escaped from its cot behind the curtain, disturbed by the voices and the light.

Mrs. Webber gave a scream.

"You naughty child, go back!" she said, harshly; "how dare you come here?—go back, Carry, at once!—go back, I tell you!"

The child shrank away for an instant, and then pointed at Neal's purse again. Neal sat aghast, trying to shape his thoughts into one form—trying to believe! He looked at the white face of the woman crouching on the stool before the fire, and read alarm thereon, and confusion. Joseph Webber sat stolidly surveying the group with his broken pipe strewn at his feet; there was some mystery yet, and the light was falling on it fast.

"Whose child is this?"

The littlegirl, alarmed by his energy, flew towards the giantess for refuge, and the woman put her arms about her, and held her tightly to her bosom.

"It doesn't matter whose it is, to you."

"You called it Carry?"

"Well," said the giantess, "I did!"

"Her child?—*her child?*"

"*And yours!*—born sixteen months ago in this caravan—sent, I think, to make a lonely woman's heart lighter. Afore she ran away, on the only time I ever troubled *your* house, she told me of its coming, and of her keeping it from you until she was sure—poor innocent! Ah! she was too fond of keeping back little secrets—and see now!"

"Her child—and *mine!*"

The purse fell from his hands to the table, and his hands dropped to his side. His child! He could believe that; he had had his faint hope of that, and held his peace also; once he had pictured much future happiness, with God's blessing, in store for him. But the happiness had vanished, and God's blessing had never been bestowed upon him—hence the solitariness of his life! His child dragging an existence out in that caravan!—to be brought up in penury, and to go wrong early—thrown early, as she would be, into the temptations besetting an existence so nomadic and crude—his child, that no one had a right to keep away from

him!—who had not sinned against him with the mother!—and for whom his heart yearned strangely.

He became suddenly calm—but his face expressed a new resolution, that the giantess saw and paled at still more.

"How old is she?"

"Sixteen months. She was born on the 13th of March, 18—. I wrote it down."

"And she lives here with you?—how often does her mother come to see her?"

"Oh! when she can."

"See if *she* will come to me?"

The giantess did not release her hold immediately—even for an instant seemed to enfold her niece more strictly in her embrace. Then she let go, her arms dropped to her side, and Neal took out his watch and held it gleaming in the candlelight. The child hesitated, looked at Neal, and tottered away from Mrs. Webber towards the golden trinket, her little arms outstretched, and her great dark eyes distending more with every step. It was the first thrill of happiness that Neal had known for a long time, and it made his chest heave and his lip quiver. He marked the smile upon the face, and though it was his wife's smile, it

did not deter him; he could see his own face there, he fancied—a pencil sketch of him, drawn by his father twenty years ago, and kept by that father reverently, seemed very like this little girl!

He drew his daughter on his knee, and let the watch remain in her hand. His brow contracted with thoughts, intense and anxious, and his arm stole round the child's, as Mrs. Webber's had done, a moment since. There was a long silence, and the giantess nervously glanced at father and daughter more than once. It was a strange position—a strange meeting!

"I think she'd better go to sleep again," the giantess said at last.

"Not yet."

Another pause, then Neal said,

"This child you would not have told me anything concerning—and yet my claim to her is first and paramount. Why keep this truth back?"

"It was wished—that's all."

"To make amends for the mother's faults, and give me one object in life worth pursuing—and yet to keep her back! To ruin her, body and soul, by a selfishness that ties her to a wretched career.

when I could have saved her by a word. This must not be!"

"What do you mean?" gasped the giantess, rising to her feet, and standing against the door.

"I mean to take her away!" replied Neal, rising too; "and there is no one here shall stay me. Tell her guilty mother, that I claim my child—whom I will not have tainted by her mother's teaching, or ruined by an example which with every year will be before her, more powerful for evil. Let me pass, woman!"

"Wait a bit, and let us talk of this, please," said the giantess, hoarsely; "I don't see that you can —I don't know that you can—I don't think that you ought. Joe!"

Joe did not move. From his place by the fire he muttered—

"I can't help. You've brought this all upon yourself—now fight it out."

"I save the girl—I give her a new life; an honest home, and a fair future lies before her. Woman! would you condemn her to your own existence, even if you had the power?"

"Sit down again—five minutes more, if you will, for all of us to think—I ask you, sir, humbly."

Neal sat down with his arm round the girl still, and she, still interested in the watch, remained wondering and destructive. Then there ensued a longer silence; the gaunt, haggard woman crouched upon her stool again, and looked intently, intensely, over Neal's head at the curtain, which swayed a little to and fro, and was unperceived by Neal.

"I don't say it ain't the best," murmured the giantess at last; "if she was my own flesh and blood, I might even part with her, for her own sake. She would grow up a better woman than ever she can here—I see that; and"—flinging her long arms wildly before her, as though appealing to some hidden witness—"it's as well to think of *that.* But——"

She came to an abrupt conclusion, and glared beyond Neal in a bewildered fashion, that would have aroused Neal's suspicions had he been watching her. But he was interested in his child; he had made up his mind, and he took no heed.

"But," she added, after a time, "it isn't right to take the baby away. When she's older, perhaps, and can nnderstand, and feel a mother's loss —but not now. I don't think that that's right."

"I can have no interference," said Neal calmly. "You had no right to keep me in ignorance of this child's existence—it is punishable by law."

The tall woman shrank at the name of the law; the law was stern and hard, and she was poor, and had no friends.

Neal rose once more, and again the woman rose with him and set her back against the door. Joe sat still impassive, and the child still clutched the watch.

"Let me pass. I have idled time too long here. I claim my child, and pay you for all trouble with that purse. Now let me go."

"Two more minutes, please," said Mrs. Webber, "and then, if everybody thinks it best—why, you must go."

"It's best," muttered Joe; "we never could afford to keep her long—and Mr. Galbraith's right for once. No thanks to me for saying so," said Joe, as though he expected Neal's gratitude for his opinion; "you're not my friend—you've done your best to kill my sister—but I speak the truth."

"Another minute—only one minute more. Give *everybody* time to think," his wife said;

"and then there needn't be any reproaches arterwards."

Another minute, and then the tall woman moved away from the door, and burst into tears.

"It's the best that can happen; but she's like a gal of my own, and hard to part with. But it's the best—the best! Here, take her little hat and shawl, and wrap this extra comfitter about her neck—it's the best. Keep strong all on us! You must write, and tell us of the child—we shall come and ask, if you don't. God bless her!—let me put her things on behind there—I won't play you false."

"Put them on here—the child is quiet enough."

Neal was distrustful, and retained his hold. That strange craving to take the child home gathered force with every instant; it was a new hope for him, and he would not chance the losing of it.

The baby-girl murmured and struggled a little beneath her hasty dressing—the gold watch lost half its attractions—the dark-faced man, in whose arms she was, became more repellent.

"There, go before she cries," said the giantess. "I kiss her for myself—here, I kiss her for her

mother, who will keep strong, I hope! Here, Joe, don't sit snivelling there—you won't let the gal go without kissing her, though you don't like children much?"

The watch dropped and hung by the length of chain—the child's instinct knew whence help would come! Then were a pair of tiny arms outstretched, and a feeble little voice whimpering forth—"Mum—ma!"

Neal moved more rapidly with his prize; the child had begun crying. Neal's hand was on the door. Webber was standing with his back against the stove, and his wife, with hands outstretched, was watching Neal's departure, muttering still, as though it were a spell—"For the best it is—keep strong! keep strong!"

"Mamma!"

Then, as if by the working of that spell, or by the breaking through it, the curtain at the end of the room was torn down, and, with a shriek of agony, a woman, with hair dishevelled, and a ghost's face, rushed across the room, and clutched her child.

"No—you shan't have her, and with her every hope of mine! I thought it might be best till

now, and that I had the strength to give her up; but I can't!—I can't!—I won't!"

"*You here!*" gasped forth Neal.

"Curse me if you will!—say what you will, and think your worst, I care not!" she cried; "I am a desperate mother, and will not part with my darling —she is mine as much as yours, and is my only tie to life. Give her to me, I say!"

Neal had shaken the child suddenly from her grasp, and held her above her mother's head. He had a claim to that girl—he could not part with her at the appeal of this demented woman.

Carry wrung her hands piteously together, and then, with a cry that echoed through the room, and thrilled all hearts, fell at the feet of him whom an unpardonable step had for ever alienated from her.

"Oh! give me my little girl!" she entreated; "I have been very wrong in thought and deed to leave you—I know that there is no pardon for it, and I will not ask it ever—but, oh! don't take my child away, for Christ's sake! You can't tell what a mother's love is, or how one life is bound up with the other—or how you stab me to the soul by claiming her. Don't take her!—oh! don't take her!"

"To be brought up in ignorance and distress—to be ever apart from a father who could have taught her better," said Neal, in stifling tones.

"Oh! don't take her!" moaned Carry again.

"It is my duty."

"It is not," wailed forth the mother, "not yet—not suddenly. Oh! give me time to think of this—to prepare for parting with my little girl, and not strike me down by taking her away all at once like this! In a year's time—give me one year, and, as I am a sinner, here kneeling at your feet, and calling to my God to witness all I say, I swear that I will give her up to you. But not now!—I can't!"

"In a year's time I will claim her, for her soul's sake—take her now, and remember your promise. Let me escape from this!"

He thrust the child into the mother's arms, which closed upon her like a vice; he tore open the door, and leaped from the caravan into the sandy earth. He was a man haunted by all the hopes that he had had once, and which mocked him with their utter unapproachableness in that hour of awful trial. He dashed on recklessly, with the child's cry and the mother's wailing in his ears—all was misery and desolation!

He struggled on through the darkness—amidst the wreck of tent and booth—amidst the wreck of humanity still flitting to and fro like evil spirits—and made his way down the hill, fighting through the wind and blinding dust to Nottingham.

CHAPTER VII.

MORE STRUGGLING.

THE next day a telegram from Neal Galbraith, Edleigh Villa, Streatham, arrived from London, addressed to Mrs. Joseph Webber, Toppin's Circus, Nottingham Race Ground. It reached there in the evening, and was a long message for the wires.

"I rely on the good faith of the mother of my child. I ask that mother to remember her promise for her daughter's sake. The money left behind is for the use of child and mother—when more is needed write to me, and it shall be forwarded. In a year's time, on July the 21st, 18— I expect my daughter home."

Carry read this message day after day, in her wanderings from place to place with Toppin's Circus; a woman who had lost much strength, and

was at all times and seasons an incumbrance to a household. She knew this now; she felt that there were times when they were tired of her—Joe and his wife—when money was short, and Toppin did not pay, and every scrap of bread was an extra expense; but that they were both too good-hearted, too good-tempered, to pain her by a word.

After Neal's visit, and Neal's money—from which Joseph Webber did not recoil so readily the next morning—they were kinder to her than before; but that might not have been for the money's sake, but for the remembrance of that night of terrible struggling.

Carry had not intended that Neal should see her child, when Joe brought home the news of Neal being on the race course; but she had planned that hiding-place behind the curtain, and had been throughout the day strangely anxious to see Neal, to hear his comments, however harsh, upon that lower estate to which she was reduced. He had come, her child had escaped from concealment, and then the great trial had commenced; and, till the last, despite her sorrow and pain, she had thought it best that the child should

go away with him whom she had called her husband once. But at the last she could not part with her.

After Neal's message, there was much to think of. Before it, on the night following his departure, there was a vague hope that he would not remind her of her promise ever again; that the excitement of the interview over, he would see the cruelty of taking away her little girl, and leave her to the one solace which the world afforded yet. But after the message, she remembered that she had sworn to that resignation, and that it was only by that oath her little Carry remained another year with her.

It was cruel!—it was like him! Why should her child be stolen away from her at an age when it would be like death—would possibly *be* death!—to give her up? By what right should she be compelled to make so great a sacrifice? She asked this indignantly of Mrs. Webber sometimes, and then ensued long arguments between them, in which the giantess sided first with Neal, and gave way at last when Carry spoke of the mother's love, and charged her with the home question, of what she would do if it were her child?

This poor woman could reason best with herself,

after all; the happiness of her child ever before her own—where might that be found?—and the future of her child when she was dead, what would that be like? Life with the mountebanks, travelling from fair to fair, brought up with them, taught their tricks, constituted an infant prodigy, and christened by a French or Spanish name—life with an ignorant and not too moral class—could she condemn her child to all that, for the sake of a few years' selfish comfort with her? She remembered all the stern words that Neal had uttered as reasons for taking away his daughter—they were hard, but they were just. She dashed down all her child's chances by the opposition. But that man who never gave way, what would he teach that daughter?—would he tell her of the mother's history, and, by his perversion of the facts, constitute it a story of a mother's shame? Teach her to look back upon that mother not as a woman whose judgment was at fault, and whose headstrong folly carved out for herself a life of misery and isolation, but a wicked woman, whom it was best to forget, and painful to allude to? No, it must not end like that; better to break her oath, and run away from all of them, leaving no trace

whereby to find her. Then came the thought that, after her flight she might die; that there would be no one to claim her girl, who would be transferred from parish to parish, remaining for ever unrecognized—drifting from the workhouse to a world of harsh taskmasters, from whom a word would have saved her years ago! What should she do?—what could she do?

One thought always came back from reasoning like this—it *was* best to part with her! Best for the child, who should be the first thought, and for whom a mother's love should be prepared to make any sacrifice—despite that awful loneliness which must follow such a parting!

Now and then she thought of her father and mother in Shepherd Street, and of the advice that Neal had given concerning them. How should he know that her father's house was open to her? Was it likely that her father would forgive her transgressions more readily than Neal?—she looked back at him as she had seen him last: cold, stern, and emphatic; he had never felt for Joe's temptations or forgiven them—years of separation affected him not—it was his boast that he was made of iron, and knew nothing of those fine things

called "feelings." To any other home she could have returned, but not to her father's. She could not face the hard words that would meet her, or the unmerciful hand that would dash in her face the gates of home. Joe was sure enough, too, that that would be a journey for nothing; the father's character was a decisive one, and both thought of it with a hopelessness that no words of Neal's could affect. Some day, perhaps, some long day hence—when he was old, and feeble, and alone—when the mother was dead, he might, for his own comfort's sake, afford her shelter; that was doubtful, even, and she would not think of it just yet.

But she would give up her little Carry—she would keep her word. In the winter time, when Toppin had dismissed Webber and his wife, for fresh novelties, when they were all stranded in Manchester, and Joe could only find money for drink —when the child complained of food and hunger, and she was in the way, terribly in the way of everybody, Carry sank her mother's love, her woman's pride, and wrote to Neal.

It was a wild letter—wild as her own moods had ever been through life—and Neal did not read it

unmoved. If there had never crossed his mind the one thought of pardoning this woman, there had been in his heart, since his strange meeting with her, a different and less angry feeling. She had wronged him none the less by her departure—her life for ever after that night of parting was a mystery to him, and could not be explained—but he saw her weakness more clearly, and could, at times, afford to pity her. He had been brought up to believe in woman's obedience to her husband; he remembered his mother as patient, dutiful, and loving; his own idea of marriage was framed from a higher standard than poor Carry had ever known. Carry was weak, wilful, and ill-trained, and Neal was the soul of honour, despite his sternness, and that oldness of thought, which was the result of his strange youth. It was an ill-match, and trouble had evolved from it in consequence. By the law governing ill-assorted couples, trouble must come as surely as the seasons, and they are wiser in their generation than Neal and Carry, if they live down the storm.

Neal was moved by Carry's letter, but he was glad to receive it. It ended suspense with him, for he had lost the clue to Toppin's Circus for awhile,

and then, finding it by agents whom he had sent in search, he learned that Joseph Webber and his wife were no longer of the company. He had wished to send money for the support of Carry and her child—but the opportunity had not been forthcoming, and his ignorance of their whereabouts was adding a deeper gloom to him, when the letter brought him hope.

"I write to you, sir, offering my child. God help me, I see that it is best! She shall be brought to Streatham next week; and may the father be kind and good to her, and teach her to think of her mother in all charity and love! I make no promise as to my right to see my child some long day hence. I will not have that promise exacted from me by you or any one, but I will do my best to keep away—to see her at a distance, where my presence shall never offend you or yours. I am prepared to go abroad for awhile—for ever, if I can. I am reduced low enough to ask even you for money."

Neal pitied her still more; for the first time since his wife's desertion of him, there came a strange yearning in his heart towards her—a belief that, at least, her life had been pure, and that, even at the

eleventh hour, he could safely take her back again. But it was a momentary impulse, and he checked it for the world's sake—for the sake of the moral!

Where she had lived, how she had lived, must remain ever unsatisfactory and vague, and he would not seek to fathom the enigma; even she did not desire to return to him; she was aware that they were irrevocably sundered, that it was best and right. Well, such a passing thought—the thought of a fool, who shut his eyes to his own honour—should never cross him again. There are some faults, he had said, in the wretched home of the Webbers, that it was dishonourable to pardon—this was the first and greatest!

But he would send her money—she should not have the temptation of poverty to struggle against—he could not bear the thought of her enduring privation. He sat before the fire with the letter on his knees, and thought of the boy's love—that infatuation which had carried everything before it, swept down opposition, and made her his wife. A boy's romance, but a man's tragedy! He drew his breath with pain in that lonely room, from which he rigorously excluded all intruders, and for the first time—he believed it was for the first—the

hot tears sprang into his eyes, dimming the fire-light. His heart was softened, but whether with the hope that was coming to him, or the trials that a wilful woman had brought upon herself and him, he did not seek to know.

Late in the following week, when he had begun to fear that the resolution of his wife had undergone some change, the child was brought to him by Mrs. Joseph Webber. He had told Mrs. Higgs the story, or some portion of it, and the faithful housekeeper came in, pale and anxious, with the news. It was night-time, aud Neal was in the study, wherein he never read, and seldom wrote, and which he only sought when troubled.

"Come!" she said. "Oh! dear!—so like you—and so thinly dressed! Oh! that poor gal, her mother!"

"Who brings the child?"

"Joe's wife."

"Let her come in here, and now leave us for a time. I wish to speak to her."

Mrs. Webber, leading Carry's child by the hand, came into the room shortly afterwards; she looked more gaunt and haggard than ever, for the winter had set in hard, and made times harder.

The child was pale and haggard also, as though she had been ill. "If she should not live!" thought Neal, at once.

"You should have written to me before," said Neal; "you wanted help—and this girl has been half-starved!"

"Her mother would not let us," said the giantess, "she keeps her pride still, poor woman!"

"Poor woman!"

"Ah! praps you're sorry now, sir? It wasn't all her fault."

"I never suffer myself to be lured into a discussion on this subject. You will please to be silent."

"Ah! you're in your own house now, and can be the master," said Mrs. Webber, coldly; "and a fine house it is to have dropped to your share. Lucky for you—lucky, I hope, to this little motherless thing here."

"I am glad that you have all thought it the wisest step to place her in her father's charge."

"I always thought that, sir, so far as the child is concerned, of course—we can't expect *you* to think anything about the mother!"

"No," said Neal, moodily.

"I have a message from her."

"Well!"

Little Carry was drowsy with the night-air through which she had travelled, and after one wondering stare at the bronze chandelier, the books and cases, nestled closer to her aunt's breast, and went to sleep there.

"She begs me to tell you again that she claims the right to see her child—when and where she likes——"

"*When* she likes," corrected Neal.

"Ah! she said nothing about the where—and she hopes that the girl may be taught to pray for her mother, and not to forget her mother ever. She don't mind if even, some day, you tell her the story—just as it happened, and how it happened, sir. She thinks that when this child grows up to be a woman, that kind of story may be understood and—pitied like."

"It may."

"I won't tell you that it's been a fight even now to part with her," said the giantess, wiping her eyes hastily with the tattered fringe of her shawl; "or how Carry went on at the last. You know how wild she can be—and what a babby in many things

she is. But we were druv very hard—and I think it hurt her most to give the gal up afore the year was out."

"What is she doing?" said Neal, looking at the fire, and not at his companion.

"Nothing—now."

"She has been doing—what?"

"Helping us with needlework—tidying up Joe's properties, and so on. Not earning a great deal for herself ever. Once we nearly persuaded her to rehearse for the 'Flower Girl of Barcelona,' but she altered her mind suddenly, and wouldn't try it—and put out nicely Toppin was about it! And then——"

"That will do—no more of a history like that, I am not interested in it! She is in want of money?"

"The lot of us—no doubt of that."

"I will not forget you."

He went to his library table, and sat down before it. When he had opened a drawer, he thought again.

"Has she ever expressed a wish for any course of life?"

"To go abroad—very often," said the giantess.

"She's a good scholard, and thinks that she might get a governess's place out in Americkey, or a shop-woman's. She would go to-morrow, if she had the chance."

"It would be better for all."

"Praps so. I don't see where the end of the bother is to be, unless she goes away, or dies. Bless you, she'll not keep away from this child three weeks!"

Neal shuddered. He saw the difficulties already in the way—of the fight between him and his wife for that child's love. If she would only go abroad, and give her daughter time enough to love him, and forget *her!*

"Here are fifty pounds for her present expenses. If she go abroad, or if she stay here, I am desirous of paying an annual sum for her support."

"She'll never take it, unless druv hard, as we've been this year."

"She may wish to go abroad at once, and prefer to receive a sum—any sum she may choose to name, and it is in my power to afford—that will enable her to commence some business."

He did not speak of her father's home again. He was selfish in his interest for her, and already

concerned for the girl whose whole life might be shadowed by the mother!

"I'll tell her."

"Let me know her decision—let me know to-morrow what your expenses have been of keeping that child and her so long—let me thank you and your husband."

"What for?" said Mrs. Webber, stolidly; "it was for your wife's sake, and, though I shan't turn my back against the money that you offer—for I ain't proud in that way, and it's your right, though you mayn't think so—it was never for your sake, Mr. Galbraith."

"Will you give me the child now, and take that money?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell her what I have said, and write to me to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, or the next day."

The tall woman rose, and put the child into Neal's arms, still sleeping, still too young to know anything of a mother's grief at parting with her, or to be sorrowed by that mother's history.

"God bless her, and give her a good father!"

murmured the woman, kissing the child sleeping in Neal's arms.

"I think He will."

"What your side of the story may have been, I don't know," she said; "but hers don't make you quite the husband that you might have been."

"I do not expect her to speak more justly of me than she has acted by me. Will you leave me now?"

"I am going. Good night, sir."

"Good night."

She came back to kiss the child again, and then she went away to meet Mrs. Higgs in the hall, lingering under the lamp there for this visitor.

"This is strange—and not too strange to do good, I hope. We want good here!" said Mrs. Higgs.

"I don't wish that it mayn't come, Mrs. Higgs," said the giantess sorrowfully.

"What has become of her?"

"Away in the country."

"With Joe—isn't she?"

"Yes."

"Let her see her father—he has altered very much; tell her to turn to her duty there, and ask

God to keep her good," said Mrs. Higgs; "tell her that an old woman says that last prayer every night of her life."

"I will tell her."

"What's Joe doing?"

"Oh! he's about the same—he hasn't got tired of *me* yet."

And with this sad irony—this Parthian dart at him to whom she had entrusted Carry's child—she went out and closed the street-door after her.

She stood there waiting under the portico, as though expecting the door to open again, and did not move away until the chain was drawn across it from within. Then she hastened on, and stopped not till she came upon a dark and breezy common at a little distance from Neal Galbraith's house. She hurried at once to a long low seat facing the road, and then stopped, with a sudden cry that she suppressed.

"Not here!" she gasped.

She had a knowledge of the place before—when she was a girl she had lived at Lower Norwood, and strayed often hither. She knew the common well, and a fear, sharp and sudden, beset her of

danger to any one despairing there. She ran on to a deep, dark sheet of water, swollen with recent rains, and stood on the brink looking wildly round her. Then she gave a cry of joy, and sat down by the figure of a woman huddled on the bank and staring at the water.

"Carry—Carry, dear—I'm so glad I've found you!"

"Are you?—what for?"

"Why, because I am," was the childish answer; "you said you'd wait on the seat till I came back, and when you wasn't there, I had such *funny*, curious thoughts!'

"That I might make away with myself in the Streatham ponds, thinking that I was of no further use to anybody, and had lost every tie worth living for—every tie that made life bearable."

"We don't know what may come."

"If I had only had the courage!—such a courage as that man had who came to Fife Street before he took the poison."

"Hush!—hush! Carry, you mustn't think like this."

"I came down here," with a shudder, "to look

at the water, but I hadn't the nerve. I was always a fool and a coward, Selina."

"Come away."

"You left the girl?—he has her?—he could have the heart to take her away from me! Oh! this is all your fault—it begins with you!"

"You may thank me for it some day."

"Well, I may—I may," she said spasmodically, "I'm too wretched now to be just. Did she wake?—was she frightened at him?—oh! did she miss me and look round for me?"

"She slept all the time."

"She will wake up and wonder where I am; and be scared by every face she sees, and cry for me! And, God help me, I shall never hear her cry again!—oh! never, never!"

She flung herself upon the neck of her sister-in-law, and sobbed wildly and passionately, like a child herself; and the woman, who had shared much trouble and privation with her, held her to her breast, and tried to comfort her by words of promise, that had but little meaning in them, and were only suited for a child.

In her weakness, the desolate mother could re-

sist such efforts to assure her of a better time; though the end of her troubles had been reached, and there was no greater agony to come—there lay no hope beyond! All was gone now!

* * * * * *

Two days afterwards, later in the day, a letter from Mrs. Joseph Webber came to Neal. A rambling, ill-spelt, worse written letter, alluding, in a business way, to the money which had been spent for Carry's maintenance, and estimating it at some small sum per week. Business matters settled by this business woman, there followed information concerning the wife. Carry had resolved to go abroad at once; before that letter reached Neal she would have paid for her passage in the *Edgar*, sailing-ship, and from the money sent her there would be enough to commence life with in America. She would attempt it, at least; she required no further help just now; she hoped that she never should. Some day she might return to see her child; she prayed that that child might remember her, and that nothing might be ever said to make that child think ill of her.

Neal sent the money to the giantess; he would have sent a further sum to Carry, but was startled by a notice in the paper that the *Edgar* sailed that day from Liverpool, at four p.m. He could not define his motives—he never sought their definition—but he hurried down to Liverpool to see the ship depart; and only learned that it had sailed half an hour earlier from the docks, taking advantage of fair wind and weather.

He went back full of thought—oppressed now and then by a sorrow, that might almost be akin to remorse, and again by a hope that the new life—the better life—was stretching out for him and his child.

Life had its duties for him again, and he could brace his nerves for a struggle with it, and take his place once again with the workers. A better time for all he prayed, even for that erring woman, who had tired of him and his home, and shaped a different course out for herself.

She had gone away, and by the sacrifice that she had made, he could think more kindly of her, —almost forgive her. And when the news came presently that the *Edgar* had been met by winter storms at sea, and gone down with all hands, he

sank on his knees—this stern man, who had been proud of his uncharitableness—and asked mercy for himself as well as her!

END OF BOOK THE FIFTH.

BOOK VI.

BEGINNING AFRESH.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARCH-PLOTTER.

NEAL GALBRAITH took his place once more in the world, then. He had outlived that desperate dark season, which had at one time foreboded an estate like unto his father's in the worst days; the gloom that had oppressed him for so long was shaken off by one earnest effort, although till his dying day he bore ever that grave, almost sorrowful, look which early cares had set upon him.

He was ever a thoughtful man; but he chafed no more at opposition to his will; and he was no longer content with sitting idly in the dusk, whilst men more energetic strove for fortune. He had been without a motive in the world, until the discovery of his child; then there were hopes ahead of him, and some-one besides his father to live for.

There were times when he would pause and wonder at his new thoughts, and if their brighter character were attributable to something else besides the possession of his daughter. Could it be possible that he was glad of his wife's death?—that to feel that misguided woman was no longer of the world, was to be less borne down by the weight of a great calamity? No, he did not think that; for his heart was lighter on the day his child came home, and he had grieved for the sad end of one so young and wilful, and who, judging him more fairly, might have been content with him.

He could judge her now with less partiality for his own wrongs, tracing where he had erred, where he had been severe when kindness should have replaced severity, and where a word in season would have saved much evil. He took his share of blame now; he had been too young to marry; he had known too little of his bride; he had been wise in his own conceit, and played the master rather than the husband; he had lured a woman from a home that had been ever miserable to her, and set her in his own house, to find but little sympathy. He had chosen for life a woman that was not free from faults, and for those faults he had had

but little mercy, but opposed them with foibles of his own, whence had evolved disunion.

He was sorry for the ending of the story, for he had loved that woman very passionately, and was looking forward to much happiness with her, at the time that she was beginning to distrust him. He had resented that distrust in preference to offering explanation, and so the whole story of misconception, jealousy, and rage, and the bubble bursting in the sun.

Well, they could never have been man and wife, and philosophy told him how much better it was that all had ended thus; better for the woman who had left life early, and whose last act was a noble sacrifice, by which he held her memory dearer after that; better for the man who had been ever oppressed by the consciousness of a woman alone in the world, bearing his name, and facing temptation. Until she had gone down in the *Edgar*, he did not think that any love, respect, or faith, remained for her; then he felt assured that he had loved her to the end of the story, and it was that baffled passion, the mortification of being misunderstood, that had rendered him so desperate and relentless.

If he could begin again from the night of that great quarrel; if he and she with the bandage from their eyes could once more turn back to that day, and live again the story, what a light upon the after-pages! He thought so with the consciousness of things neglected, and chances thrown away; but had the sea given up its dead, would he have taken her to his heart, forgetful of their years of separation, and the life they had lived apart? It was doubtful; Neal never asked himself that question—he did not think of it. The wife was dead, and her loss had troubled and chastened him; he was a different and a better man.

He was Pike's partner before the summer came —ere the summer was ended, they were working side by side; two business men with confidence in the result of their energy; both careful, patient, and hard-working, as befitted the principals of firms in bud. They were like brothers now, and had for each other a brother's interest and love. Neal had discovered the real merit of his partner, and valued it at its just worth—between him and Pike there would never come dissension again. There might pass above them a cloud, born of business life and City struggles, but never

the doubt to set them at arm's length. They might sorrow together—never apart!

Meanwhile little Carry throve apace. The change was good for her—a large house, a careful nurse in Mrs. Higgs, all that could tend to benefit a child, and give it strength and health, were forthcoming, and were repaid by a nature naturally affectionate. The mother, alas! had been a fugitive thing to mourn for, and when the winter had come round again, the reminiscence of that fair care-lined face was very far away and misty. Then the *Edgar* had been a wreck twelve months, and Neal was rising in the world, and seeing his way with Pike to independence.

Neal betrayed more than a father's fondness for this child; it was an absorbent love, that his business friends might have made matter for much ridicule. It was a love that stood between him and the office books, and took him home regularly after business hours, to devote the rest of the evening to his daughter. It was more like a mother's fondness than the grave, far-away love of a man who has his bread to win, and is troubled with the ways of winning it; it made every sacrifice for the child's enjoyment, and was intensely jealous if she

seemed to love another for an instant better than him. Such love is always repaid by a child quick to find out the idolater, and Neal was happy and grateful enough for the return. It pleased him to witness the preference for him over that for Mrs. Higgs and his old father—how the latter were neglected, along with the new toys, when his welcome knock was heard. As the little dark-haired girl came rushing into his arms, the tears rose into his eyes, and he would hide them in the raven tresses showering about her face. He was becoming happy in his way—and for the calmness of his life he was a grateful man.

He was warned more than once that he would spoil his daughter; that to grant every wish and to fiercely resent any attempt to thwart her, would bring its punishment, and do much harm; but he paid no heed to that. He had been stern enough in his day; he should win more love if he were gentle, and if his little girl loved him for his thoughts of her, why, nothing more was needed. In a few years there would remain only themselves to think of one another—and be to each other father and daughter, always loving and true!

He told this, or something like this, to David Pike, when that methodical gentleman was startled by broken ornaments, damaged bells, and time-pieces with the hands wrenched off, at Neal's house.

"Ah! very true, perhaps—but it isn't the right way. A wilful child is likely to grow up a wilful woman, Neal."

Neal drew a deeper breath at this. A wilful woman like her mother, perhaps!—a woman who might marry and make some home wretched by her rash resistance—he had not thought of that. Still he had never the heart to check her; he saw her only after office hours, and knew nothing of the days' excitement she had created for the nurse-maid, for Mrs. Higgs, and the grandfather. Anticipative of the exercise of his authority they had troubled him at one time with many complaints; but he had listened dreamily, and then set her on his knee to play with that watch which had first tempted her when she was at Nottingham with the strollers.

"There's plenty of time, Pike," Neal said, on another occasion, when his friend had been prompted by Mr. Galbraith, senior, to urge a

second remonstrance; "she's very young—wait till her mind is formed more."

"I—I really think that it's getting very alarming," said Mr. Pike, for little Carry had been carried away to bed in a paroxysm of rage that evening; "you *should* exercise a mild, but firm authority."

"She would not have cried if I had promised that she should sit up to supper."

"At her age!—good gracious!"

"We don't sup late—and I see so little of her, Pike."

"If you should ever marry again, what a difficulty you are preparing for the wife, by giving that child her own way."

"If I should ever marry again!—does that possibility still strike you, then?"

"Sometimes," said Mr. Pike, blushing.

"I ask you again to dismiss it from your thoughts for ever. I am living for my daughter now."

"Your daughter may marry some years hence, and leave you a solitary man."

"Don't talk of Carry marrying!—you chilled my blood for hours before with that idea, Pike. Let the evil day keep in the background till my flower has blossomed."

"I'll say no more just now."

Mr. Pike went home very thoughtful and disconsolate. His old wish, that old, old train of thought had beset him lately, though he could not see his way clearly to the end. The road was open now, and man and maiden were both free! It was the great hope of his life to marry Neal to Addie; before Neal's marriage he had thought of it; to Neal's widowerhood the dream had come again. Why, it was what should have been at first, and what ought to be now. Here was a gentle, pious woman, calculated to make Neal happy, and take much happiness in another's rejoicing—who would enhance his comfort, and be a good mother to his child—and here was Neal free to choose her, just the man for her, earnest, full-hearted, grave, with a soul above frivolities, and yet there was no motive force to make them more than friends. Such a couple as they would be, understanding each other so well, and all the better for companionship together; and yet to never think of falling in love with one another! In all his experience, he had never remembered anything one-half so disheartening.

That Addie had had some foolish sentimental

liking for a flashy young man of the name of Tressider, was nothing to the purpose now, any more than that Neal had been once madly in love with Carry Webber. Love dies out and is renewed again—and the second passion may be more worthy than the first, and more enduring—why should these two stand for ever apart in life? Once more he assumed the character of plotter—ever a clumsy part with him—and did his best to put Addie on her guard against his insidious designs. Addie watched her uncle's plans, and thought with a sigh of the folly of an idea that her confession should have dissipated long since; but she did not speak again of the vanity and vexation to follow his manœuvres. There was but little, if any, progress made, and she could afford to wait awhile.

Neal and Addie did not meet very frequently. The uncle took his niece with him to Streatham occasionally, but she was more of a favourite with the old gentleman than the young one—or, at all events, received a greater amount of attention—and she had so much to say to Mrs. Higgs. Mr. Pike did not see his way clearly to Neal's visits to his own house—Neal, who was always talking of his Carry, and anxious to get

home to her; but he was seized with a new idea at last, and it succeeded better than he dreamed.

Mr. Pike and Addie were both fond of children, and their neighbours had a few to lend them, now and then—Mr. Pike was struck with the harm that might attach to the moral growth of a girl without companionship of her own age.

"That child must become old-fashioned, Neal," he said.

"Become thoughtful and a little odd, perhaps—where is the harm?"

"The brain expands, and the cranium, which is soft in adolescence, expands with it, and becomes a preternatural size, and the child stands an excellent chance of dying—that's all!"

"What!" shouted Neal.

This was a flying conversation over the desks for once, but the arrow was aimed well by Mr. Pike, and struck the mark intended.

"Who told you that?"

"Oh! I have studied that sort of thing a little, you know."

"Where am I to find playfellows for the child? My neighbours hold themselves aloof from me or I from them—I scarcely know which now."

"Send her to school."

"To be browbeaten at her age? Why, it would break her heart!"

"Bring her to our house more often, and let my neighbour's children meet her there. There's a capital room where they can run about—the lot of them."

"Thank you—it's very kind of you, Pike. I'll think of it."

Mr. Pike opened his desk suddenly, and put his head therein to smother a chuckle, that must inevitably escape him. Neal had snapped at the bait, and good might follow from this pleasant scheming. He was right in his ideas of companionship for children, but they certainly had not troubled his mind a great deal, and he blushed to find himself so artful.

Neal went readily enough to Hackney with his daughter; he took his father with him also, and the old gentleman, who had given up sketching and inventing lately, joined the children, and went upstairs with them into "the capital room" that Mr. Pike had eulogized, and was most excellent company there.

That evening, little Carry, flushed with excite-

ment, breathless with her play, came bounding into her father's arms, to whisper how happy she was; and Neal saw that Mr. Pike's reasoning was correct enough.

So Neal Galbraith took his child very often to Mr. Pike's house, and saw a great deal in these latter days of Addie Merton. Addie had grown very staid, he thought, but she was always very amiable. He began to wonder whom she would marry in the times ahead of her, and what had become of young Hedger, whom he had seen once smitten by calf-love. Looking at her, he could believe with Mr. Pike in her power to make home worthy of its name—and he thought that it was not very strange for his child to take to her suddenly, as to a young bright-faced mother.

These were thoughts verging on a new idea, but they did not disturb Neal's heart, if they crossed his mind at times, and more often crossed it as the world went round.

And Addie Merton, on her guard against the enemy, and watchful of her uncle—what of her? This meek young woman, who has too many good attributes for a sensation heroine. Well, we have something strange to relate concerning

her: she held her peace, and never reproached her uncle David for duplicity!

She saw Neal at his best, with no invention on his mind, and no home cares; with no morbid restlessness, that suddenly broke bounds and verged on ruin—but the Neal Galbraith that nature intended. He was not of the times before his marriage, or when that marriage had proved a mockery and a snare; but of the better days, when comfort had been brought him, and he had shown his gratitude by his better life. He was grave, but the smile would steal back to his face at times; he showed his heart when speaking of his child; he was attached to her uncle, almost reverentially attached, as to a man who had saved his life; he was ever kind, gentle, and courteous, and there was in him a nobleness of feeling and expression, that had ripened with his years. He was liberal in his thoughts of others, and a satire shown in his dark estate had wholly left him; there needed only more religion, more faith in that peace which religion can bring, to make him a true hero in her eyes. In a few words, she began to fall quietly in love with Neal Galbraith, and to forget that old hero for whom, by the rule governing contraries, she had once nearly

broken her heart. She was ashamed of that liking now, for Tressider had proved himself wicked and unworthy, and she had only thought him weak. There had been a hope to save him—an intense hope that the chance might fall to her lot—but he had gone away into the mist-land, and she might pity him hereafter, nothing more.

"I see it ending like a story-book," Mr. Pike would exclaim to himself in solitary moments, when he would indulge in most irreverent gambols for a stanch dissenter—"happiness for him and her in the days to come! It's as plain as ever it can be, and," he added in an illogical manner, more befitting Mrs. Higgs than him, "it's getting plainer every day!"

CHAPTER II.

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE.

NEAL GALBRAITH had a faint idea that he was free from any great trouble for ever—he, a widower, scarcely four-and-twenty yet. All his cares had come early in life, born of an early marriage, that had turned out unfortunate; and if the path before him were not steeped in sunshine, still it lay far back from the darkness, and he could trace his quiet steps thereon.

He did not expect, yet awhile, at least, any great trial, and he was thunderstruck one day with the tidings that little Carry had been taken suddenly and seriously ill. He bore the news with something of that firmness which had ever resisted the first shock, but his cheek paled very much, and care seemed to deepen on his face. Little Carry had been fifteen months with him then, and the spring of the second year was coming round

again when this new trouble came round with it.

"It's a sore throat," affirmed Mrs. Higgs, "and I'll nuss her through it, as I nussed her mother once, poor thing! It may turn to fever—just a kind of fever-like—but she's young and strong enough to live it down."

"I have always fancied her a little delicate, Mrs. Higgs."

"Get out with your fancies, Mr. Neal!—there never was a child more 'bust!"

But the 'bust child grew very rapidly worse, and did not fight against the fever so well as could have been wished; the doctors came—the physicians followed at last. Neal neglected his share of work at the firm, and took his place at his daughter's bedside, watching and praying, as only mothers watch and pray in most cases.

"I don't think," he said to Pike, who had called late one night with Addie to inquire concerning the child, "that God will deal with me so cruelly as to take my little girl away."

"Hush!—hush, Neal!" cried Mr. Pike—"it may be God's will."

"The doctors don't give me much hope," continued Neal; "but I value not their opinions, and

I have confidence in her recovery. Why, she shall recover!"

"I hope she will," said Addie; "but I would not assert my wish so defiantly, Neal, and—and I would be prepared."

"What, you against me, too?" said Neal—"you full of fear for a result that cannot be? Do you honestly believe, you religious people, that I shall be deprived of that one stay? I should go mad, then, at the utter blankness left me!"

"You have borne up against greater trials, Neal," said Pike.

"Never!—never!"

There was an aggravation of that particular trial coming—unforeseen also, as is the nature of most trials that befall us. Mrs. Higgs, ever watchful nurse, untiring, gentle and ever womanly, succumbed to the fever also, and was taken to her room, to be nursed in her turn. What was to be done now? —whence was fresh help to come? He was inconsiderate, even selfish, in his next step; but he could think only of his child in danger, and that carried him away in search of Addie.

"Will you come and nurse my little girl?" he pleaded; "I cannot trust her to the hands of hire-

lings; her life is precious, and a true sympathy is valuable. It is a great favour that I ask you, but I do not fear that you will come."

"I will come, Neal, with all my heart."

Mr. Pike was from home, and on his return was met by Addie's letter, informing him of Neal's request, and of the step taken in consequence.

"She will be of great use—she's a brave little woman, and always was; now, if that child gets better, Neal will as surely love her with all his heart as I do. But—oh! good heaven! I forgot that!"

Mr. Pike collapsed. The fever might strike Addie in its turn, and take her away from him—that girl whom he loved as Neal loved his daughter. It was very wrong of Neal to expose Addie to this danger; he would start for Streatham, and remonstrate at once on the impolicy of the last step. Mr. Pike started, to find all remonstrances in vain. Addie Merton was in her proper element, and in her best light, as nurse and watcher. That little primness, which belonged to her every-day life, and which rendered her old-fashioned—just a little—disappeared with tasks of greater weight than appertained to every day; and she was an

earnest woman, doing her work of charity well and unobtrusively.

"My dear child, you must come home," urged Mr. Pike.

"I am safe here," she added, in a lower tone.

"Safe with fevers blazing about in every direction—goodness gracious!"

"And I am happy here."

"Hap—happy!"

He looked into her face, and she looked down and blushed vividly. Her uncle snatched at both her hands, and their eyes met again.

"Addie, is it true that—that you may like Neal some day?"

"I—I don't know—when Neal likes me, perhaps—which can never be! Don't say any more!"

"But God bless you, Addie! I'll say that. I feel almost happy myself now, and not afraid of fevers in the least!"

He was more nervous the next day—the following more sanguine. It was an obstinate fever that had stolen into the house of Galbraith, and though it attacked no further member of the household, yet it clung to the old servant and the child with a

pertinacity that boded ill for both of them. Still hope in recovery never wholly left Neal; he maintained that there would come no fresh calamity to cast him down; and no gentle whispering of the young nurse could render him more reverent.

Possibly the illness of Mrs. Higgs did some good to Neal, and distracted him a little from one morbid thought. It threw his father on his hands more, and it made him interested in the second invalid. He was the messenger passing from one room to the other, and bringing the latest news to the old lady.

"I'm thinking that I'm taking this fever mighty cool, red-hot as it is," Mrs. Higgs said to Neal one day; "and I an old woman, who can't have much strength to bear up 'gainst it. But I'm not afeard, Master Neal."

"Why should you be?"

"I mean for the end—the arterwards. I think I've done my duty, as well as I could, 'sidering my letters—I never tried to do any one harm, that I 'members."

"Ever the best of friends—the most faithful and affectionate."

"I used to fret once, because you didn't say too much to me, as though I'd 'fended you. But that was only your great trouble."

"Only that."

"Do you mind, if I should get worse, writing to Johannah?"

"I will write at once, if you have any wish to see her."

"She's old, and I should not like to scare her," said Mrs. Higgs; "but if you'll just write the letter and keep it by you, child."

"I'll go now in search of her, if you wish."

"Not to-day."

The following day Mrs. Higgs was better. The day following that, she said the letter might be sent—not that she was worse, but that Johannah might like to know how ill she had been. The letter was despatched to Shepherd Street, but no Johannah came. Presently the letter was returned through the dead letter office, with an intimation in red ink:

"*Gone away—left no address.*"

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Higgs, sitting up in bed in her astonishment and honest indignation; "if that isn't 'common sisterly! I'll get

well, just to find her out, and tell her a bit of my mind—see if I don't!"

And Mrs. Higgs got rapidly well from that minute.

But the child lingered still on the confines of life and death, and Neal grew more anxious, despite his shallow assertions in his girl's recovery. He began to *look* more anxious, to become lined and sallow—to be nervous of a footfall in the passage, or a strange voice in the house—even the rustle of a dress approaching, seemed to alarm him as with the coming of an awful truth, to which his sense of fear had given keenness. "But little Carry would not die—he was assured of that," he said!

When he was least assured, and he was looking like the old Neal Galbraith, who had had but little faith in anything, the turn came for the better. One day a stronger pulse—for the fever had been fought against and conquered, and it was the exhaustion to which little Carry was likely to succumb—a second day, not quite so strong, perhaps—the third, much stronger than it had been for weeks, and the child awakening to life again with the spring flowers! One evening, when Mrs. Higgs

was almost well again, and was downstairs pillowed in the drawing-room, with old Mr. Galbraith amusing her in his turn by reading aloud to her the obituary of the *Times* for that day, Addie Merton came in bright and radiant.

Neal looked up, and then held both his hands towards her. He guessed the news that, like his guardian angel, she had brought to him. The doctor's carriage was rolling away from the house, but had not taken hope along with it.

"Out of danger!" cried Addie.

"Didn't I say so?" exclaimed Neal, triumphantly—"and you were all so full of nervous fancies!"

"And you too, Neal," said Addie—"there, never mind your prophecy—come and see Carry; she has been asking the doctor whether you may sit with her awhile."

Mr. Galbraith and Mrs. Higgs, who had expressed their satisfaction also, watched the two pass out of the room. Their eyes met, and both started at the meaning in them.

"God bless me, you don't say so!"

"I never said a word."

"But don't you think——"

"I think that it's more than likely, and that it would be the best thing that could happen, sir."

"I don't know that; these marriages turn out so strangely—they're not like marriages used to be. I should get very low-spirited if I thought that Neal——"

"Well, I wouldn't think about it," interrupted Mrs. Higgs; "but get on with the *Times*. Is there anybody dead to-day about my age?"

"I'll see, ma'am."

Mr. Galbraith, senior, put on his spectacles again, and read, without any warning, or without noting the effect on his listener, or being struck with the truth that startled Mrs. Higgs, the following lines:—

"*On the 14th inst., at Ilfracombe, North Devon, in the sixty-third year of his age, Josiah Webber, late of Shepherd Street, Southwark, deeply lamented by all who knew him.*"

"Good gracious!" gasped Mrs. Higgs—"then, while we've been a-coming round, he's been a-going t'other way!"

Death had marched in when least expected, and its shadow fell on Mrs. Higgs, at least.

"I wonder whether he thought of Joe at the

last, or what he has done with all his money? He never answered that last letter of mine to Shepherd Street, telling him of the *Edgar* going down—and now he goes down too! No, let's say UP," she corrected, "though they'll never make an angel of him—he may come in handy somewhere!"

CHAPTER III.

AN OFFER.

WHEN Mrs. Higgs was stronger, she wrote to her sister Johannah a letter of condolence, not unmingled with sisterly upbraiding. She regretted to hear of Mr. Webber's decease, and thought that Johannah would regret to hear in her turn—she might be wrong to assert as much, and it was a matter for 'peculation—that the writer had been laid up many weeks with fever. She alluded cursorily to the ill-health of Mrs. Webber's grandchild—a relative in whom her stolid sister had not deigned to evince the slightest interest, despite the letter Mrs. Higgs had written to her at an earlier period.

Mrs. Webber's answer arrived in due course—a trifle more illegible than her sister's, and taking Mrs. Higgs several days to decipher. It came,

hoping that Mrs. Higgs was well—although apprised to the contrary last week—as it left its writer, or rather its dictator—at present. Mrs. Webber had had a hard time of it with her husband before it pleased the Lord to take him; he had been a misery to himself and all about him, and it was a mercy for him, and more especially for all about him, that he was gone at last! She did not think of settling in Devonshire, but of coming back to London again, as soon as her nerves were stronger. Joe and his wife were with her; Mr. Webber had left them a good deal of his money, and screwed *her* down as tightly as he could, which had been Webber's way through life, though she had never murmured, and was not going to begin now. And with her kind love to Mr. Galbraith, the child, and Mrs. Higgs, she was her affectionate sister in grief and wailing, Johannah Webber.

"It's a funny letter!" was Mrs. Higgs's comment on this epistle; "but she always was a *little* funny! I wonder how much poor Webber died worth, and whether Joe'll drink hisself to death now? Unless they tie him up, I think he will!"

Meanwhile, Mrs. Higgs had other thoughts be-

setting her—other incidents, born of the experience of her daily life, to wonder at. She had scarcely entertained a hope of little Carry's recovery; and now the child's progress back—slow and fitful yet —to life, was a something to feel grateful for, and a matter for a little astonishment.

The old faithful servant could watch the child's interest in her new nurse—in the young, patient gentle-hearted woman, whom Neal had constituted watcher there. Mrs. Higgs had heard of Addie Merton very often, but had had few opportunities of meeting her, and studying her character— "taking her in," as she termed it. Addie did not lose *caste* by being "taken in" by Mrs. Higgs; the old woman was no mean judge of what was best for Neal, and she saw in this amiable woman where the solace for one who had been so long apart from it might be found. She was as good a judge of the relative merits of Neal and Addie as Mr. Pike was, and she hoped, within herself, that Neal would marry again, and find a new mother for his child. When the child evinced a love for Addie, and moreover a docility in her hands that was a novelty to all beholders, Mrs. Higgs hoped more than ever that the time would come

to wish joy to Neal's new wife in this young woman.

She began to wonder then if matters were progressing; if Neal ever gave a thought to the advantages within his reach, perhaps; or if Addie—always circumspect, and so great a contrast to poor Carry—ever gave a thought to Neal, or had a wish to cheer his heart and grace his home.

"They keep it quiet enough atwixt them," thought Mrs. Higgs; "and she'll be a-going away next week, at farthest, and then Master Neal will fall into his old ways, or get spoiling that girl again, just as he used to do. And Carry will get strong, and smash the heads off all the ornaments—which I'll thank God to see!"

Little Carry was gaining strength each day when Mrs. Higgs was beset by thoughts akin to those we have recorded; and developing with each day a fear that she should soon be well enough for her new friend to go away from her.

Addie was already paving the way for their separation—feeling some little natural embarrassment at her position there, and troubled now and then by those shrewd, awkward questions in which

children will invariably indulge at seasons most inopportune.

"I don't like to hear Addie say she's going to leave me, pa," little Carry once said, when Neal was standing by the mantelpiece, watching child and nurse. "It's very nice to be just ill enough to have her here."

"Hush, Carry!—you must get stronger now, and learn to do without me," said Addie.

"Why?"

"Because I have a home of my own, and a dear good uncle, all alone, who wants to have me back."

"Uncle can come here, and then you can stay, dear Addie! Pa, won't you ask Addie to stay here always, and take care of me?"

Neal started, but recovered his equanimity with tact.

"Addie is always welcome, Carry."

"There!" said Carry, triumphantly.

"Always welcome!—I hope so. You and I, Carry, will have a long talk about this to-morrow. Have you seen my Uncle David to day?" asked Addie, turning suddenly to Neal.

The conversation was changed, and Neal, after a few remarks, left the room, and went straight to

his study, where he turned the key upon his thoughts.

Those thoughts were many, but all tending to one common centre, now. Could he afford to lose this chance—his last chance of happiness with Addie Merton? Was it not better for himself, his child, his home, if the power lay in him to induce her to accept his name? He was not a vain man; he had but little faith in his influence over womankind; his first marriage had proved his want of judgment, and would it be wise to risk a second? After all, was it in his power to win any woman's affection?—had he not been ever too stern and cold a man?

His was an absorbent disposition, and sank within itself; if he had altered much since his first wife's time, was it an alteration for the better? He thought this over, but could not see clearly to the depths of his own character; if he were a more patient, charitable, man, it might be for the reason that his way had not been seriously disturbed lately, and his only care had been for the better health of his daughter. If she had died, he could not tell where his consolation would have lain, or whither his despair might have hurled him in the end.

He reasoned more for Addie Merton's sake than his own. Supposing that Addie might be brought to like him at some future day, she would never be happy with him, he was certain. He would exhaust her patience and gentleness in a very little while, and then the old misgivings! Better to be always alone, with no one to be troubled by his vagaries, and his daughter always at his side to love him. And yet this young woman was ever thoughtful, ever considerate; she seemed to understand him; more than once he had witnessed her facility in turning the best side of difficulties to the light; she was very amiable; to win her love once would be to retain it for ever, a pure and priceless gift that only death could take away. If she had not the impulsiveness of her whom he had lost, if she were graver even than her years warranted, still she was not a dull woman, and he had never known one of such rare intelligence. For him she was too good; her standard of a wife's duties was a high one, and she could only love a husband equal with herself—some even-minded member of her own sect, unselfish and unworldly, with that faith in his God, and that submission to God's will, which he had never had. In good time she might

teach him by the brightness of her own example; but he was not an apt pupil, and why should he dream of foisting upon her his crude, imperfect self? Leave him standing apart there; he was sure that he was best alone!

Having settled this question in his mind, it was strange, even annoying, to Neal to find that it recurred again with all its vexatious arguments. He could not bear the thought of losing that young face from his household, and he shuddered more than once at the dulness of that home when Addie had quitted it, and his child was fretting after her. What a mother for that child, too! bringing little Carry up to love, honour, and obey, teaching her what it was never in *his* power to teach, and offering always the example of a virtuous life! Surely, for his child's sake, he should reflect more seriously upon the chances in his favour, and even submit himself to the mortification of a denial of his suit. Now and then he hoped that he might make her very happy; he would profit by one lesson in the past, and, at least, do his very best to render her content.

He was not certain if it were really love that he was beginning to entertain for Addie Merton; there

were feelings very different in his heart towards her now, but that arose from gratitude for her past services to his child, perhaps; he could not tell. He might be anxious to secure her for his own sake—he thought that that was more than possible—but he missed the romance, the mad impetuosity that had marked his boy's love for Carry Webber. He did not know that romance comes but once in life, and that his heart had sobered wondrously; and he missed the excitement of the chase, the agony of uncertainty, the passionate craving to be loved, that he had had in the old days. It must be for his child's sake that he wished to bind Addie by a promise to him, and that he looked forward to her leaving him with such regret.

When next week was decided upon—next week little Carry would be about the house again, and taking short walks in the sunshine with her nurse—Neal was wretched enough, and when the day was fixed for her departure, he became absent and irritable to a degree that surprised himself, somewhat vain now of his own especial gravity.

They had become good and true friends—as if they had not been true friends all their lives, for

that matter—should he let her go away without attempting in some manner to show his gratitude? A few set phrases of acknowledgment for her services and then good-bye, seemed scarcely kind, and gifts of value would look too much like paying her for all past charity.

Going away, too, at that time, augured a more than common separation, unless there followed a right to see her afterwards; he should have no excuse to visit her without his child, from whom night-air was strictly interdicted. Should he ask her to be his wife at once, or should he bide his time and seek an opportunity more fitting for his hopes? Surely that opportunity would never come if she left his house and he made no sign before she went away; her heart was full of the child now, and she had learned to love her charge very dearly, and to feel some sorrow at quitting it. Only yesterday he had heard Addie enjoining his daughter not to forget her when she had gone, but to love her always, as Carry would always be loved by her nurse.

"You'll come back soon, dear Addie?"

"Soon—perhaps."

"Pa will fetch you, if you don't, I know. Me come with him some day and fetch you back for good."

After that there was a strange hush in little Carry's room, and Neal, though he walked still slowly along the landing, heard no more.

The last day, Neal was eccentric in his actions. He did not proceed to business as usual, and since Carry's convalescence he had been regular in his attendance.

Addie expressed a little surprise at his determination.

"I shall see Mr. Pike this evening; he is coming to fetch you home."

"But are you not very busy just now?"

"Very busy," replied Neal, "and I am very selfish to leave the lion's share of the accounts and correspondence to my partner. I will make amends to-morrow."

Late in the morning, he said to Addie suddenly,

"You will be glad to get back?"

This was a difficult question to answer truthfully, or to parry. They were alone together for an instant, and the abruptness of Neal's question startled the maiden. Was she quite truthful in her answer?—this little dissenter, who never remembered being ashamed of the truth in any phase before?

"Yes," she said, in a lower tone.

"Nursing must be very dull and tedious," said Neal, gloomily—"the nursing a child fretful with fever above all."

"I have not found it so," said Addie. "If I be glad to go away," she added this time, "it is for my uncle's sake—he must have found home a very dull place lately."

"He will be glad to see you back too—yes, he must have been very lonely in that quiet house of yours."

"He is a quiet man, and easily content," said Addie, enthusiastically; "reconciled to my absence, and knowing it to be unavoidable, he would sink himself in his papers, or his microscope, or in his Bible, and study the long nights away. God bless that gentle-hearted, even-tempered man, I have never met his like!"

"A good man—I say, God bless him too, Addie," said Neal, thoughtfully. "I often try to think why he took an interest in me above the majority of his friends, and in what way I deserved his interest."

Addie blushed.

"And yet," continued Neal, still looking at the

ground, and noting no embarrassment in his companion, "what would have become of me without him? If I could even now, in some way, imitate his regular life, and march as calmly and evenly to the end—if by some miracle I could only learn the secret of his great contentment in these latter days!"

"Is it so hard to learn, Neal?"

"It is impossible."

"Without faith—yes. But with it?"

"Still impossible," responded Neal; "faith, if it were attainable, might teach me to hope in hereafter, but would bring me no resignation upon earth."

"You are wrong."

"Unless—"

Mrs. Higgs entered at this juncture, and Neal paused in the eagerness of his argument. Mrs. Higgs was sorry for her advent—as sorry as Neal, perhaps, and hastened to apologize and make matters worse.

"I am terrible vexed I looked in," she said. "I didn't know that you two together were a-talking so 'fortably, and it's only a thimble that I've missed too. I won't be a minute."

But Addie was not disposed to linger there; the spell was broken, and the subject had almost begun to scare her sober senses; there had been such animation in the last words that Neal had addressed to her. She could have listened before Mrs. Higgs' remarks, but not now, with that motherly soul rubbing one hand over the other, and looking at her admiringly. Before the housekeeper had withdrawn, Addie was in her own room, trembling somewhat, and packing up with hasty hands.

Neal went for a stroll in his garden after that interruption, and his daughter seeing him there, came out to join him that fair spring morning. Neal was ever a good companion to his child, and his dulness, his apathy as it were, perplexed little Carry, after two quiet strolls along the garden paths.

"Are you sorry too, pa?" asked the daughter suddenly.

"Sorry for what?" he rejoined.

"For Addie Merton going away for good?"

"Yes."

"It can't be for good when you are sorry too, can it?"

"For her good—yes."

"Why, pa?"

But pa was not further disposed to respond to these inquiries, and father and daughter entered the house once more.

Later in the day, when the sun had gone down, the evening was coming on apace, and Mr. Pike was expected every minute, Neal made his second plunge. It was worth the risk of refusal; it was losing his last chance to let her quit him in silence; he had been dull and miserable before her advent there, and with her going would pass from him the hopes that he had fostered.

She was in the drawing-room, waiting and watching for her uncle in the twilight. Neal and his father were approaching it together, when Neal stopped suddenly.

"Will you bring down your portfolio to-night, sir?" he said precipitately.

"Ye-yes, if you wish it. What's there in it that you would like to see?"

"Oh! half-a-hundred things!"

"I'll send——"

"No, go yourself. Take my advice," said Neal,

with some excitement, "and fetch your own plans. It is important."

"Bless me!—something has happened. Mrs. Higgs has lighted the gas with the Galbraith boiler, perhaps. Oh! dear, I'll go at once!"

"Thank you."

The simple old gentleman, who came no nearer to the truth from Neal's demeanour, trotted away. Neal passed into the room, and valuing time at its just worth, darted at once into the subject.

"Addie, I am going to frighten you very much."

"I hope not."

She answered with her characteristic rapidity—answered fearlessly, for all the wavering colour in her cheeks.

"I am going to ask you to come back here presently, in the old post of comforter—to make me happy as well as little Carry—brightening this home, and setting out with me to the new life wherein, God willing, we shall find content. Do you understand me?"

"I—think—I—do."

"To become my wife; to set yourself the task of altering me—an eccentric man, soured by a heavy disappointment, that only you can lighten—to try

to love such a man, and make him stronger, better, and more trustful?"

Addie was silent; she turned away her head towards the window, whence the twilight stole, and Neal felt that it was ominous.

"You are right to pause," he said, more mournfully; "it is a great venture on your part, and a gloomy home, as well as a saddened heart, I only offer you. But by-and-bye I shall come back, step by step, to my old self, blessed by the example of your cheerfulness."

"I do not pause for that reason, Neal. I would share your life willingly to-morrow, if I were sure that you——"

"That I?" asked Neal, anxiously.

"That you *cared* for me! That this is really love!"

"Would you?" exclaimed Neal, clasping his arms round her. "Then it is the love of my whole heart!"

"Then why didn't you say so?" cried Addie, bursting into tears, then laughing hysterically, and hiding her head upon his shoulder.

Neal was very happy after that avowal; he did not care to talk of being led to happiness; only a

little way from him—a hand's length—and light and life were coming with the day-dawn. They were a quiet, even a common-place pair of lovers, disinclined to rhapsody; one had outlived romance, and the other had never understood what it was like. One had been sobered by the shock of reality; the other had been ever real and unaffected, regarding things seriously, and brought up seriously; a true-hearted girl, ever on the shady side of the way, but at all times a cheerful woman, deserving of a reward such as she thought was coming to her then.

"What will Mr. Pike say, Addie?" asked Neal. "How surprised he will be!"

"I am afraid not."

"Afraid!"

"I think that he has read our secret, our wishes, more correctly than we dared to read them ourselves, before to-night, Neal."

"How deep these quiet people are!" said Neal. "But surely he never thought that you——"

"He had a vague suspicion," murmured Addie.

"And I so completely in the dark!" was the reply.

"But, Neal," said she suddenly, "you must not

believe that I have been in love with you all my life, nursing an ugly secret to my breast, when I had no right to think of you. I loved you," she said saucily, "when you deserved me, not before."

"How conceited we are!" said Neal, laughing.

"I did love—or fancied that I loved—some one before you. Will you forgive that unpleasant confession for its truth's sake?"

"Yes."

Neal was thoughtful for an instant, then said:

"And this rival—this lucky man to gain the first thoughts of your heart—a dissenting minister, perhaps?"

"No—Walter Tressider."

Neal started away for an instant, crying out, "*That man!*"

"It was a fancy, born from nothing, Neal," said Addie; "he never gave a thought to me, and only offered me a few kind, careless words, when I was a girl. I was filled with a vague sense of my power to turn him from evil, and alter his whole life; and I was sorry, very sorry, when I found out his utter weakness and unworthiness. Finding that out, Neal, was to shame my woman's fondness, and to prove that, after all, it was half vanity, half

pity, that had led my thoughts towards him for a little while. There, Neal, I would not have a secret from you for the world now; and having confessed my wickedness, you must tell me that you are cruelly deceived in me, and will not love me any more!"

"Must I!" exclaimed Neal, drawing her to his heart again; "but supposing that my courage fails me at the last?"

"I detest cowardice."

"Are you bold enough to tell me, Addie, that you really love me, then—better than ever you did this weak, handsome villain, who scares me once more with his shadow?"

"Yes, Neal—bold enough for that."

But she was not bold enough to look into his face and say it, though he would have had her meet him with her large dark eyes. But she made no effort to disguise her rejoicing; she had learned to love Neal Galbraith with all her heart, and it was very pleasant to have him at her side, and be assured of his affection. Such a love as theirs made others rejoice too, and there was no one in all the world to sorrow at this engagement, beginning in the bright spring-time.

"Bless my soul, Neal, lad!" exclaimed Mr. Galbraith, entering with his large portfolio before him, "what! sitting in the dark?"

"Yes—but I've company here."

"Eh!—who?"

"Your daughter Addie—the new daughter that is coming to chase the darkness away from us for ever."

"Oh! dear," sighed the old gentleman, dropping his portfolio and strewing the carpet with its contents, "he's at it again!".

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD RIVAL.

MR. GALBRAITH, senior, took some time to recover his equanimity; it was not till after Mr. Pike's arrival that the family settled down in its entirety—settled down, as it were, to a deep sense of the peace awaiting them all. The old gentleman was satisfied also, although he had already begun to talk of furnished apartments, with Mrs. Higgs to manage him, when the new wife came home.

"I'm not going to be in anybody's way, any more," he said; "I know the young people will find me a nuisance and a bore—and when it is all settled, Mrs. Higgs and I will look about us. I shan't go far away, and knowing Neal to be altered for the best, will make me thankful under every circumstance."

"Well spoken," said Mr. Pike; "we'll all sur-

round this couple with our homes, so that the warmth and brightness here shall radiate to us. But we'll leave them to themselves, as is befitting."

"To be sure, sir—exactly, as you say. If I had done so with his first wife—a good young woman enough, only a trifle hasty—there wouldn't have been——"

"No, no—exactly," said Mr. Pike, hurriedly; "and now there can't be."

He dismissed the subject of the first wife, as inappropriate for that once—and when a man has just chosen his second, possibly it is an awkward topic of conversation. At all events, it seemed a little embarrassing; so poor Carry was set aside, without a dissentient voice; and there were other hopes, and another wife to think of.

Neal went home with Addie and Pike; the days of escort duty had come again, and the new life had already begun. Strange to *him*, in the beginning, it seemed to believe in his courting days once more—happy days enough, but tinctured with a far-off melancholy, as though the remembrance of the first love lingered with him still. It was a staid courtship, although an earnest one; there were no secret meetings at a brother's house, no

one in opposition to the marriage—everybody's consent, given with a blessing into the bargain—a wild, impetuous girl, replaced by an equable maiden, who would never utter an angry word, and love on peacefully to the end—whose heart might be broken by unkindness, but would never rebel against its choice. A woman who might pine away beneath the disappointment of her marriage, but would not fly to the unknown away from it —whose existence would be regulated, from the beginning to the end, and in the face of every obstacle, by her duty to her husband and her God.

Neal was content—more than content, for he loved Addie Merton more with every day. He would prefer a quiet woman for his wife, and he did not care for a never-ceasing protestation of affection, which would desert him at a time of trial. When the troubles came, she would be at his side, all the stronger for her reserved force; and he could see, looking ahead of him, that peace of mind passing all understanding which she would bring him with her love.

They were to be married in the winter time, when Neal's widowerhood was two years old—Addie

would have no earlier day fixed. Neal was satisfied; he had no fear of losing her, of a rival stepping forward and winning so rare a prize unto himself; and it was pleasant, very pleasant, to call upon her and her uncle in the week-days, and to look forward with her to the life in store for them. He would have scarcely forestalled his marriage by a day; his marriage days had been full of discord, and there might lurk some faint suspicion of a something to shadow even that second estate, in which he had more confidence. There was content in the present, and he had known so little of it, that he thought it worth the treasuring.

The summer had come, and they were at Pike's house—Neal, his partner, and Addie—when a visitor was announced.

Pike looked at the card, rubbed his ear with it, looked from Addie to Neal, and coughed.

"It's Walter Tressider," he said at last.

Neal's face darkened, and Addie gave a little jump of dismay for an instant. What did Walter Tressider want upon the scene again, and whose felicity had he come to mar this time?

"Shall I go out to him?—there is not any necessity for meeting him now, Neal," suggested Mr. Pike.

"I should like to see him for a little while," said Neal.

"You'll promise me——" began the other.

"Oh! he is safe in my hands—I hear no malice against him; he has never done me any injury."

"I am glad you think that, for her memory's sake, Neal," said Addie, pressing his hand.

Neal felt her pulse, and looked with a smile into her face again.

"You are not very much disturbed at the old lover's advent?"

"No—not much."

Addie laughed too—and when a woman can laugh pleasantly and unaffectedly at her first love, it is all up for his chances ever again. It had been Addie Merton's duty to love some one else lately, and she had learned to love with all her heart.

Mr. Walter Tressider was announced. He came in, lank of stature, seedy in attire, with a lined face and a weary step—the ghost of the hero that he has been to more than one woman of our acquaintance. He lost his listless demeanour at the sight of Neal, and stood irresolutely at the door, his hand held for a moment to his lips in nervous fashion. Then his better

self—and he had never been more than a weak man, with bad impulses—took him hastily across the room towards Neal, with one hand extended.

"Will you shake hands with me?—me who have inherited my father's power to do harm to you and yours? Will you forgive all the harm unintentionally done, and the evil of which I have been the cause?"

"You are sorry?"

"I have come a long way to express that sorrow—to attempt to stand better in your estimation, Galbraith. As God's my judge, the last time that I saw your wife was at your house in Fife Street!"

"I have thought this long since—I am glad to have the last witness to my wife's innocence before me. The evil following his wickedness and weakness, I can forgive more readily."

He took Walter Tressider's hand for a fleeting instant—sign of his pardon, not as a pledge of any friendship in the future.

Walter Tressider heaved a sigh of relief, and dropped into the chair that Mr. Pike had placed for him.

"I was a wicked fellow!—a great fool, Gal-

braith!" he said; "but I did not think my folly would fall on other heads as well as my own. When I heard from Joseph Webber, yesterday, of all the harm that had befallen her and you, I came away at once to see you!"

"It is late in the day," said Neal, a little scornfully.

"I have been abroad—I only returned last week—I only heard the whole truth yesterday. You remember," turning to Mr. Pike, "that I went away to seek my fortunes?"

"Yes. I hope you found them."

"I lost them, sir," said Tressider; "I did not succeed in Australia—the world did not take kindly to me there, and instead of a success, it was next door to a failure. It's my luck, I don't complain; I have always been an unfortunate fellow, and I shall keep so to the end. I gave up acting, and went to the diggings; found a nugget and got robbed of it; I came back almost penniless to England again, and have only, by dint of very hard pushing, dropped into a walking-gentleman's place at a second-rate theatre, the lesseeship of which is vested in Joseph Webber. And I believe," he added almost savagely, "that Joe has taken pity

upon me, rather than seen his way to making money out of me. I have broken down, and even Joe Webber can see that!"

"Mr. Webber has come into his father's property, I believe?" asked Neal.

"Some of it—I don't know how much—he never told me. No one tells me anything! I'll do my best to push the fortunes of his house, though it must come down with a run if he puts his wife in every piece; she's too big for a star, sir, and she can't perform a bit!"

"And his mother—where is she living now?" asked Neal. "A woman isolated like her might have had some little wish to see her grandchild."

"She's in the country somewhere, I believe. I'm not quite certain if she and Joe Webber did not quarrel about buying the theatre—Joe said something of the kind, but I didn't pay much attention. I wanted a good start in the next new piece, and a line to myself in the play-bills!"

And this man had been a hero in his little world, thought Neal—perhaps Addie also! This weak, selfish being, had had the power to wreck a whole life's happiness, and yet without being a principal to the misfortune, or

scheming for it. This man, whom Carry had loved before her marriage, and of whom Addie had thought seriously!—verily there must be love-philters still, such as Titania's eye-lids were steeped in on that immortal night in Midsummer.

But Walter Tressider was of the new times, and had altered much. Though there were good qualities in him still, yet they had suffered diminution, and it was only an impulse that had touched his heart and led him to seek Pike out, and, through Pike, Neal Galbraith. The old story was a strange one, and appalled him for awhile; he had had the good sense, the manliness, to disavow all share in it, for the sake of the woman whose life he had blasted. He was intensely sorry for Carry and for Neal, and eager to be thought free from blame in some respects, if not in all. The confession made, and the forgiveness granted, he became Walter Tressider again—despairing in one instant, sanguine in the next, a poor pitiable fellow, aging wondrously fast, and with his face requiring rouge and pearl-powder, and the full glare of the foot-lights, to look its best ever again.

He was not after awhile even pleasant company;

for he diverged to his stage-life, and was only at ease with stage reminiscences, and the three listeners took no interest therein. He saw this after awhile, in a flash of clearer inspiration, and rose to go.

"I don't suppose we shall see much of each other," he said sorrowfully; "and yet it's hard to give up all one's friends. I never thought that I should like a fellow as I did you, Galbraith—but then I didn't act straightforwardly, and I lost you! I have been going on my own reckless way for years now, and was not conscious of a good thought until I heard your story yesterday, and then I *did* feel as if I shouldn't like to be set down so bad and black as that made me. You won't think the very worst of me?"

"No."

"You'll find in another good wife your happiness again. In—in Miss Merton, perhaps," he said, detecting quickly enough the smile that passed between the lovers at this juncture.

"Yes," was Neal's frank answer.

"I am very glad to hear that—to wish you two both joy. Though I shall not see anything of you ever——"

He paused, as though half-expecting a protestation against this assertion, and then went on again, after meeting no response.

"Still I shall think of you both, and hope you're always happy. Upon my soul, I shall!"

These were Walter Tressider's last words, energetically, almost dramatically delivered—they are the last words which we shall chronicle from him in these pages. Though he played his part in the final scenes of this life's drama, and helped again indirectly to Neal's last trouble, we shall not meet him any more. He passes away, a poor, spiritless being, who had not seriously intended harm to any living soul, and yet who had done great mischief in his day. Now and then we meet these vapid fellows on the route we are pursuing, and think too lightly of their influence for evil. They are sometimes despicable—but they are always dangerous.

"Could I ever have thought twice of such a man as that!" said Addie Merton, with horror in her looks. "Oh! Neal, dear, what can you think of me?"

"He was a man we have all liked at one time or another—perhaps," he added, drily, "may like

again. Give me my answer early in the day, Addie."

"One answer always, Neal!"

She flung herself into his arms with a suddenness and impulsiveness that was so like his first wife's, that he drew in his breath for an instant before he folded her in his embrace. Did love render all women impulsive and passionate, even women highly trained to decorum?

"My dear Addie," exclaimed Mr. Pike, with hands uplifted, "this is a trifle too demonstrative. I'm not quite certain that it's etiquette!"

CHAPTER V.

WILL NOT SURPRISE THE READER VERY MUCH.

PRIOR to this, little Carry Galbraith had thriven apace. Nature set about its grand re-actionary movements after her recovery from the fever, and in a few months no child was stronger or brighter than she. She grew, also, a child of rare beauty, whom people in the streets paused to observe at times, and comment on, whom motherly old ladies, and tottering old gentlemen, with children next their hearts still—those to whom children are dear, are of the true old stock—sought to stay and inveigle into conversation, and were somewhat disappointed by Carry's wilful manners.

For Carry, in full health and high spirits, was a trifle wilful. Her father had helped to spoil her, and Addie's gentle teaching had only been in fugitive moments, and was not yet to exercise its full effect. A loving child at all times

and seasons, loving in her very wilfulness, but strangely impulsive, even for a child. Anxious for a gift, impressed by a passing fancy, and almost ungovernable until it had been attained or rendered. In many traits of character so like her mother, that Neal would read therefrom a moral, at times, and strive his best to model her anew, lest in after life there should evolve a reflex of that mother's fate.

Neal saw the error that he had committed in his anxiety to win his daughter's love, when there was Addie's love also to give vigour to his life; he saw the danger, and tried his best to check it—but it was never in his heart, not even till his dying day, to check the child as well. The attempt was always a failure, for his was a deep, unreasonable love, and he could but snatch little Carry to his breast, and try by love to make her good. In this he could succeed, and therefore point to his principle as sound; but wiser people—Mrs. Higgs, and Mr. Pike, to wit—shook their heads, and remained unconvinced.

It was customary for the nurse to take little Carry for a walk on Streatham Common, when the mornings were fine and dry—walks which invaria-

bly resulted in a chase round furze bushes, and on the verge of ponds, till the nurse, flustered and disarranged, succeeded in capturing the fugitive. Once little Carry had nearly been lost—according to the nurse's story—and a second time "as nigh run over, Mrs. Higgs, as ever you could spose a child could be, by a pheayton and pair coming down the hill like good uns!" and Neal had doubled his staff of nurses in consequence, despite Mr. Galbraith's assertion that it was rather extravagant, and altogether unnecessary. Therefore, it happened that in the summer time, little Carry was guarded by two nurses, before whom loomed a prospect of instant dismissal if the child were exposed to danger ever again.

The child was with its nurses, when a young lady, in deep mourning, stopped the *cortege*—a lady who seemed a little agitated in demeanour, for all the thick black veil that hung before her face.

"You will excuse me," she said, almost abruptly, "but you are Mr. Galbraith's nurses?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I have seen you before with that little girl—what a pretty child she is!"

"Yes, ma'am—it's gen'rally considered so. It's the complexion does it."

"I wonder if she would speak to me?"

The lady stooped and said a few words behind her veil to the round-eyed, staring child, who backed against her nurses' skirts, and finally turned and hid her head therein.

"Speak to the lady, Carry," said the nurse; but Carry stood her ground, and would look round no more.

"You must forgive my stopping you," said the lady, with a voice that had become suddenly very troubled—"I am fond of children, and this is like a little one I lost."

"Oh! indeed, ma'am!"

"Very like! Good morning."

The lady put something into the hands of the upper nurse, and hastily resumed her progress; the under nurse immediately said "halves," and in her eagerness to see the extent of the *douceur*, tumbled against little Carry, and overturned her into the dust of the roadway, whence Carry began to yell with a forty-horse power falsetto.

Before the nurses could restore the equilibrium of their charge—and, to do justice to them, they

betrayed no excitement or indecorous haste in this undertaking—the lady in deep mourning had the little girl in her arms, and was endeavouring very vainly to subdue her agony.

"You should be more careful," said she, in a tremulous, almost passionate voice; "the path is steep here, and she might have hurt herself most seriously."

"Lor! children are always a-tumbling about, mum!" said the under nurse—"they will *horse* so!"

Under-nurse evidently a female of indifferent education, and consequently inclined to be familiar with her betters.

"Let—let—let me go to Mary," sobbed Carry, and the child flew into the arms of the upper nurse, and was caressed, and called "a little dear" in consequence.

The lady went her way again—very slowly, very thoughtfully, and with many backward looks towards them; the nurses resumed their conversation, after little Carry had become perfectly assured that no considerable damage had occurred.

"A harf-a-crown," said the under-nurse—"well, that's a lady with more money than wits, anyhow!"

"She's just lost a little one, and it makes her

heart tenderer, you see, Susan," said Mary; "didn't you notice the lots of crape?—and what a silk, sure*ly*!"

"The oftener she comes this way the better, if she's going to fling harf-crowns about!"

"Mrs. Higgs said that people weren't to speak to the child—it was only an excuse to get us into talk."

"Mrs. Higgs be bothered!"

The nursemaids streamed on their way, after the custom of nursemaids in general, upper or lower, high class or low. Laughing, criticizing, and commenting on all passers-by; glancing askance at the butcher's man dashing so recklessly by in his pony-cart, that there was scarcely time enough to wink at them; and actually nodding at the policeman, rattling past on the other side of the way at the rate of half a mile an hour.

The lady in deep mourning—the woman who had lost a little one, and whose heart was tender—must have been of the world, worldly, if there had been any desire to convey a wish unspoken to see that child again! Half-crowns are capital symptoms of interest, and invaluable mediums—little Carry was conducted that particular round,

at that particular time, for many mornings in succession, but the lady did not reappear.

It was three weeks afterwards, when Carry was running wildly about the Common, in defiance of all rule, and the nursemaids were sitting on a bench under a tree—one dozing complacently, and the second intent on some trimming for a bonnet, to be worn surreptitiously with flowers on the first convenient opportunity—that the strange lady came again.

Little Carry had obtained a bough of a tree from some part of the common, and was dragging it after her triumphantly, singing and crowing over her prize, and oblivious to all surroundings, when this woman in black—a colour that always scared Carry by its sombreness—dropped before her, almost on her knees, as from cloud-land.

"Carry!—Carry, dear!" she said, appealingly.

Carry stopped, and stared at the speaker, who had thrown back her veil from a very pale, but very pretty, anxious-looking face—a face that children might take to readily, for the very love there was for them imprinted thereon. A young face, too, and not unlike the child's, as was natural enough!

"Carry, will you come and speak to me? Just for a little while—for a very little while, my darling!"

"Me mustn't speak to anybody out of doors," said Carry, with becoming dignity, standing with her legs very wide apart, and one little white gloved hand still clutching the bough of the tree behind her.

"I want you to wear this little locket, Carry—a pretty little locket, to hang round your neck, like pa's big watch. Will you come to me, and let me put it round you?"

"Yes."

Carry was vain of adornments—years ago she had been tempted by that big watch, to which this lady had alluded. She left her bough trailing on the grass, and ran to the stranger, who passed over her neck a something suspended by a frail gold chain, and then held the little girl close to her heart, and put her face against hers, kissing her very passionately. Carry began to whimper and grow scared.

"Try and think, dear, where you saw me a long while ago—whom you loved best in all the world, then!"

"Me never saw you."

"Oh! do try and think—look me in the face again, and say you haven't quite forgotten me! There, there, don't be frightened, but put your arms round me like this!—and let them comfort me!"

But Carry was fairly frightened now; she tore herself away from the stranger's arms, and ran screaming to her nurses. When those valuable adjuncts to a gentleman's establishment were brought to a sense of passing events, they became aware of Carry clinging to their skirts, and the lady in black at a distance from them, kneeling on the grass, with her hands spread before her face.

They ventured to approach her, and the lady rose and drew down her veil.

"I am afraid that I have frightened your little girl," she said. "I wanted to she if she would let me kiss her—she is very shy."

"Sometimes, ma'am; and sometimes a limb."

"Her father loves her very much?"

"He spiles her, mum," observed the under-nurse; "she can't do wrong, and we can't do right. Just like all the masters who are molly-coddles with their children. I'm sure, at my last place, where the old gent had a young wife——"

"There, that'll do, Susan," said the upper-nurse, who understood proprieties, for she had been in real gentlemen's families, and might have married a butler; "the lady don't want quite so much talk. Try and stop that child's screaming, if you can."

"*You* had better see to that," suggested the lady. "Be gentle with her—don't scold her, it was all *my* fault."

Another half-crown, and then the lady walking rapidly away, stopping suddenly to watch them out of sight, returning to the bend of the road, whence she might see them once again, finally dropping on the seat recently vacated by the nursemaids, like a woman struck by sudden illness.

"My God!—utterly forgotten! My own child —my little Carry, whom I loved so much!"

Then ensued sobbing that was scarcely human—deep, intense, and prostrating—such as mothers grieving for their children can only give way to, and live.

And this was a mother who had grieved much, and had had much to grieve for—a woman who had not tortured herself with "fancy-troubles."

The reader doubtless has been waiting for her—the astute reader, who does not believe in ships

going down, with all hands, in novels, but scents the catastrophe when anything like wholesale destruction is hinted at. Well, we did not anticipate startling one good friend by Carry Galbraith's resurrection, and it was not for the sake of a shabby little mystery that we sank that fine screw-steamer the *Edgar*, but rather that our characters should develop themselves at their best, or their worst, by these means. The explanation will evolve in due course, and in Carry's hair-breadth escape there will be nothing to marvel at.

Meanwhile, the child was at home, on her father's knees, full of wonder at the incidents of that eventful morning, and full of admiration at the present that had been given her.

Neal frowned as he held the locket in his hands, and said to Mrs. Higgs:

"How many times have I expressed a wish that strangers should not talk to Carry?"

"But they will stop, some of 'em—those that are fond of children—it's only beggars and gipsies that I can't bear to see 'taking notice.'"

Neal opened the locket, and looked at the fair hair twisted beneath the glass there, and yet was scared not by the truth.

"It's an odd fancy of some childish old woman," said Neal; "it would be better to let the nurses take a different route. Some people would be mad enough to steal the child; I have read of such cases."

"Bless us!" ejaculated Mrs. Higgs.

Neal twisted the locket in his hands still; suddenly the back flew open at his touch, and the face of the dead wife seemed starting once more to life before him. He held the locket at arm's length, and gasped for breath.

"Look here!" he said at last.

Mrs. Higgs had to find her spectacles, rub the glasses, and fit them on securely, before the opportunity for inspection was arrived at. Neal was still spell-bound when Mrs. Higgs bent over him.

"Why it's—it's Carry's face!"

"Yes."

He rang the bell and demanded the presence of the nurses, who came, were cross-examined, and could throw but little light upon the mystery. It might be an old woman, it might be a young one, they never saw her face—she was dressed in deep mourning—she said something about a loss that she had had—a little one, or a little loss, they

were not quite certain now—and she frightened the child very much when she put up her veil, and little Carry was doubtful whether the face was old or young, man or woman's. Carry was very anxious to impart information, and so altered the details with each recapitulation, that Neal, Mrs. Higgs, and the nurses, were equally bewildered.

When Neal and Mrs. Higgs had been left together again, the latter solved the mystery.

"Why, it's Johannah—she's come to London to see her grand-child, and time she did, for that matter! And she's given her Carry's likeness, and showed more thought than I should have ever fancied she 'sessed."

"It is probable," said Neal, the truth not for an instant suggesting itself to him. In the life apart from books—the real life to which Neal belonged—it was not likely that the doubt would cross this man.

"When Carry grows to be a woman, she may treasure this," said Mrs. Higgs; "if I were she, I should like to know sometimes what my poor mother's face was like."

"It is natural."

"She may keep it, then?" said Mrs. Higgs, anxiously.

"Yes—let her always wear it, if she will."

CHAPTER VI.

THE CRISIS.

LIFE went on peacefully with the Pikes and Galbraiths; the harmony pervading everything seemed not, at the eleventh hour, likely to be disturbed. Lapped in a false security, they believed that they were people who had outlived storms. All had ended well with Neal Galbraith—all had been well ordered from the first. He could teach himself to think so, sitting patiently in the sunshine of his new life, waiting for a happiness that he had once dreamed would never come to him again.

He had not been patient until then; now he could believe that his had been a wisely ordered trial, that had moulded him anew, and taught him the lesson of endurance. He bore no longer malice in his heart against the dead; for the dead he had

ever sorrowed, pitying the errors of the past and pardoning them, seeing clearly now where they had merged in errors of his own, crossed and re-crossed until the truth was difficult to solve in the midst of heated passions that had had their day. His had been in the beginning a tragic life; he had chosen a passionate woman for a wife, and then would have made a statue of her; thinking, like a fool, that a few words spoken solemnly before an altar could change a whole life's character! He had expected implicit obedience after a child's promise, and the waking had been bitter, and brought desolation. It was a story to look back upon and profit by; and he was very grateful in his heart that the guilt of a woman's unfaithfulness no longer rested like a brand on Carry's memory. She had not acted like a wife in her love and honour for him—not as Addie would act, for ever, and in the face of every obstacle. But the past was finished like a story-book, and the dead had buried its dead completely—its dead but irreparable wrongs.

Mr. Pike thought so also, and could find courage to speak of the first wife occasionally; and though there was always pain in tracing back the remin-

iscence, Neal would not forbid the subject, or attempt to shun it. Even Addie and Neal would dwell upon poor Carry's story, and both could see that a woman's jealousy had lain at the bottom of many actions that had been hitherto mysterious. Neal had known this long since, but Addie had scarcely suspected it. A woman jealous of a lover she could imagine—why, she could even be jealous of Neal, she thought!—but a wife suspicious of the good faith of him to whom her life was pledged, and whose life was part of hers, that was beyond the belief of a pure-minded girl, until Carry's true history was guessed at.

So the first wife, still living and still desolate, belonged completely to the past, and all past friends could pity her more completely for that consciousness. Knowing this, it was just possible that Carry had held her peace, and preferred thus seeking out her child, strangely and mysteriously. Ere we close our chapter, we shall know all the truth.

That truth was very close upon Mr. Pike one evening in July—one summer evening, when he was alone, and Addie and Neal had gone for a walk together before the night set in. He was

sitting at his window, deep in chemicals—all his honest soul absorbed in acids and gases, following out some experiment from the pages of the new number of the magazine he loved. In this self-absorbent way he was always content; this love of study would make amends at a future day for Addie's departure; he did not suppose that he should ever marry now; he had so many hobbies to attend to, and was so fond of his own company! Violent emotion he had always objected to, and quiet, religious, even-tempered beings constituted the majority of his friends. He would be ever the same to the end, and would die an old bachelor, not because of an early disappointment, or of the scoffer's doubts of that sex which he had always highly estimated, but for the reason that the search for a wife had struck him as a study which would rob him of much valuable time, and unsettle him for deep experiments. If the woman whom he could have loved and reverenced had come in his way, that would have been a different matter. She has not come yet, however, and David Pike's hair is getting very grey!

Mr. Pike was sitting at his window, then, very intent on his researches, when a lady was an-

nounced. No name was given, and he did not pay much heed to the omission.

"Show her in," he said, still counting drops from the phial in his hand, as though a life would escape, should one too many find its way into the glass beneath.

Carry Galbraith came into the room—like a ghost from the other world—and stood at a little distance from him, motionless and waiting, with the veil thrown back from her face. Mr. Pike was conscious of a visitor; he had given one fugitive, almost imploring glance towards her not to interrupt him at that instant, and then counted on, until the end was gained, and he could devote more attention to the stranger.

Then he bowed, apologized, rose to place a seat for the lady, and stopped—thunderstruck, as at a ghostly visitant indeed!

"Mrs.—Mrs. Gal—"

He could say no more, but he dropped into a seat himself, and stared horror-stricken at this awful guest.

"It is *you*, then!" he murmured.

"Yes, it is I! I could not stay away longer, and let my staying work more mischief than I

deemed it would. I thought that I was acting for the best till now. Now I have come here to CONFESS!"

"Sit down, please. Let me think!"

Carry Galbraith took the chair that he had indicated a few minutes since, and Mr. Pike sat watching her, doubting even yet the reality of his bewildered senses.

"Back to life like this!" he gasped forth at last; "how was it, and by what miracle?"

"I never stepped on board the *Edgar*, sir," said Mrs. Galbraith; "I paid my passage money, and then went to bid farewell—even to ask forgiveness—of my father, who would be glad, I thought, to hear of my departure. He had been ill, and had become very weak; he begged me to forget the past, to forget everything, and stay with him, and—I stayed with him to the last."

"Causing much evil by your silence—and doing harm to those who have never wished *you* harm!—I am very sorry!"

"That I am living?" said Carry, quickly; "well, so am I. That is part of my confession!"

"Hush! hush! Mrs. Galbraith! That is not right!"

"I saw that wish upon your face, sir, and I can believe that it was an honest one."

"No, I hope that you did not see that. I am sorry for your conduct—for that love of secrecy about your actions which has ended before this time in deep humiliation."

"Right, sir."

"May I ask the reason why you acted with this wild design, forgetting the dangers to which you exposed so many?"

"I acted for the best in my poor judgment," continued Carry; "it was the accident of winning a father's love that bound me to home-ties again, and made me grateful for the old home's shelter. It struck me that it was better to keep silence for my—Mr. Galbraith's sake, and that he would think more kindly of me, and teach my child to think so also, if he believed that I had gone down with the *Edgar*. My faults then would not affright him so much with their enormity, but be toned down to the level of human sympathy. Sir, I was not wrong."

"Go on."

"And then, Mr. Pike, when he could think more charitably of me, and believe at least that

no guilty thoughts had hurled me from his home —only his hard thoughts of *me*—I fancied that I would go abroad—keeping ever away from him, as it is my duty to do, for his honour's sake now, and write to him, telling him the truth."

"If you had only written a few months ago," moaned Pike.

"My father's death had left me rich. When the news came to Ilfracombe, in my aunt's letter, that my child had been dangerously ill, I returned to London to see her, if the chance presented itself—to see her once or twice before I went away. In London, my brother came to me with fresh news—awful news—from Tressider, the actor, that your niece was going to marry Neal. I heard that news this morning—I am here to-night!"

"Thank God, your coming has followed promptly on that information you received, and it is not too late to repair the terrible error, of which your wickedness has been the cause."

"Always my wickedness!" said Carry; "well, I can bear reproof pretty well now."

"You come to stop this marriage?"

"I come to confess all to you, in the first place.

I am glad that I have found you here alone. I suppose it *is* right to mar Neal's last chance?"

"Suppose!" ejaculated Mr. Pike.

"I come to ask your advice, sir—I have no friends in whom I can implicitly confide—I would make reparation for all, if I only knew the way."

"What did you think?" asked Mr. Pike—"what could you think?"

"That they need not know of my being alive—either your niece or Mr. Galbraith," she said in an excited whisper; "that it would be so much the better for her and him to have no knowledge of the truth! It would be very easy to delay the marriage by a few excuses at the last—to postpone it, just for a little while, and then——"

"And then?" echoed Mr. Pike.

"And then I shall be dead in earnest!"

"Good heaven! madam, what morbid reasoning is this!"

"I have been told that I cannot live, sir—that I shall not see another year. With every day I am growing more weak, and it will be only a little while that they need wait. This would save explanation, that will turn him against me again,

and would be—I am sure of it—so much the best."

"No, no, so much the worse for yourself, for all who would plot so horribly against God's laws. A wild, weak, childish scheme, my poor woman, that the truth would shiver at any moment. It cannot be."

"Very well," sighed Carry; "I did not wish it for myself."

Mr. Pike sat gazing at her, and thinking what a child she was in earnest still. He was not surprised that there had been unhappiness in Neal's married life, linked to a woman full of vague conceits, and with so poor a knowledge of what was reasonable. A woman whom a man—the right man—might have made a different being, and who had in the face of opposition slowly sunk away from right. Who would do evil that good might come of it, and had been so strangely tutored, that right and wrong were difficult to separate, even from motives utterly unselfish.

"You must tell Mr. Galbraith all the truth, then," she said, after a long silence.

"I abide by your advice."

"At all hazards, the truth."

"And all the truth of this confession," she added, "that I cannot live, especially. It is a merciful thought to me, and it will give *him* strength to face his disappointment."

"Your life is in your Maker's hands—you must not talk of it as valueless, or think so lightly of death, madam."

"You are a preacher," she said, a little scornfully. "If you had suffered like me, you would not care much for life."

"Your faults have made your sufferings," replied Mr. Pike.

"Oh! sir—I do not deny that."

"Will you leave me now, and give me time to prepare Addie and your husband for this shock? I cannot see the best way yet."

"I will leave you."

"And your address?"

"I am living with my mother at Park Road, Stockwell. Possibly you will call, and let me know the result of my visit here, and what Mr. Galbraith thinks of me? Remember, this was no studied effort to strike at him!"

"I will remember. I—" Mr. Pike saw the room-door opening, and ran towards it, with both arms

extended—"Back, Addie!—back, Neal!—the dead has risen, and you must not face it yet!"

"Uncle!"

"Where's Neal?—where has Neal gone?"

"Home. What is the matter?"

It was too late. Mr. Pike noted the affrighted glance over his shoulder, and made no further effort to stay his niece's entrance into the room. Addie Merton came in rapidly, eager for the truth that had startled her uncle; and the truth rose at her entrance, and stood confronting her, in the wife, and—the rival!

"Is it—is it you?" cried Addie, glaring into the face, dim in the twilight now; "and how is it?"

"He will tell you"—with an impatient gesture towards Mr. Pike—"when I am gone. It is a story that I have not the strength to tell again."

"Mrs. Galbraith—I demand it!"

Addie was indignant and imperious—a woman roused to a sense of injury that was inevitable, and not to be atoned for. Mr. Pike had not seen his niece like that, and he wrung his hands tightly together, till every joint cracked in them.

"*You* have no right to demand anything of me," said Carry, drawing herself up proudly and

defiantly—the woman's instinct repelling back the rival with disdain, even in those latter days, when she stood apart from all of them. "Ask him, I say, again, when I am gone."

"This has been a trick to shame me—your revenge, perhaps!"

"I have not thought of revenge, or seen anything to be revenged for," said Carry, hollowly; "but I will not respond to your demands, Miss Merton. In the old times it might have been my place to demand back that husband's love you stole from me—now, it is too late!"

"It is false!—all false to think that one thought ever crossed my mind injurious to your peace. That was an error, vile and unjust—that was a disease that preyed upon your mind, and drove you mad!"

"Well, I will believe it, if you wish it," said Carry, wearily. "I came not hither to quarrel with you—rather to promote your happiness. Ask him!" she said again, with an impatient gesture towards the listener once more.

"I—I do not understand this yet. I have been duped by this woman. I cannot see for her one excuse."

"You love Mr. Galbraith—you were going to marry him!" said Carry.

"I love him. I was going to marry him—to make his after-life, with all my heart and strength, his comfort, and my own."

"Marry him, then—to-morrow, if you will!" said Carry, impetuously, with that old rash vehemence that lingered with her still, signs of the old weakness. "You do not sting me by your bold avowal. But give me comfort as well; ask him to give me back my child, my little girl, that has forgotten its poor mother!"

"Mrs. Galbraith," urged Pike, "I beg that you will go. This is not calmness now, and will but do more harm—not repair the harm that has been done."

"I have no wish to stay."

She drew her mantle round her, and went away, quickly and silently, like the shadow of evil that it seemed she had become. With every action of her life some evil now to cast down others with herself, and merge all in one common ruin. In good faith she had stolen into the house of her husband's friends; but she was a woman still, and

the woman in her rose at the rival's presence, and resisted.

Mr. Pike returned to the drawing-room, and rang for lights at once, waiting to take the oil-lamp from the servant-maid, and then passing in with it, and turning the key on Addie's sorrow.

Until then, he had not witnessed grief in Addie —not that intensity of grief from which he, vain man, had ever believed she would escape. And now, even this strong, brave girl, who had been the comforter of others, and been ready at all times with the best word, the brightest hope, urging one, and seeing the other as it were by inspiration, was cast down at last.

"Addie!—why, Addie!—you of all women!" he murmured, bending over her.

"Why did you prompt me to love him?—show that it was next your heart that I should love him, and lead me on, even out of gratitude to you, until I loved him for himself?"

She was sitting in the chair that Carry had quitted, with her arms upon the back of it, and her face hidden within them.

"I was wrong to interfere, my Addie," said

Pike, soothingly, as though to a child; "all my fault, for which I hope to be forgiven. If I plotted for your happiness, it was in the dark, and knowing nothing of the mystery that this weak woman had wrapped around herself. I thank heaven that she has come in time to save you!"

"To save me—or to leave me broken-hearted and ashamed!"

"No, no—to grow more strong, chastened by an affliction unforeseen, and to accept with resignation this check upon the vanity of human wishes. Why, you and I together, Addie, will see many happy days yet—both young, both with the knowledge where peace is to be found, both loving each other, as a father and child should love, to the very end of life!"

"I will be strong, presently—but it is not easy to think of resignation yet."

"No. In the good time, though—it will come to such as you."

"Why should it?"

"Why, Addie—you ask me that!"

"I am no better than other women who have been sure of happiness, and then been baffled.

Oh! I did not deserve it—though I was vain of my good works, and did not see how weak and proud I was becoming!"

"You proud!"

"Tell me that woman's motives."

She sat up very defiant still—looking stonily at Fate, as though she repelled its blows yet, and was strong for resistance to the end.

Mr. Pike told her, briefly and clearly, all that had been related by the wife—the motives that had been alleged, and which there was no right to doubt.

"She loves him still?"

"Yes, there is but little doubt of that."

"I will try and forgive her," she said suddenly; "uncle, I think that I can forgive her."

"She has sinned in ignorance—she has striven for good, Addie," said Mr. Pike; "we can pity her as well, I hope."

"She will never think that *I* need pity," said the rebellious heart again.

"Pity we are above—comfort we will find for ourselves."

He pointed to the Bible lying on the table by the window—a Book that, in that house, was

opened very often—and Addie bowed her head. The tears rained on, but they were not so full of bitterness.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER MEETING.

EARLY the next morning, a man—who, at first sight, seemed a man in years, he stooped so much, and looked so care worn—knocked at Mr. Galbraith's door. To the woman who opened it—to Mrs. Higgs, who responded to all summonses if she could reach the door in time, and who ejaculated his name in dismay, guessing a new trouble with his looks—he said,

"Where's Neal?"

"I think he's up. I heard him go into his study a little while ago. Oh! what's happened now, sir?"

"Something that seems scarcely real yet, Mrs. Higgs."

"Bad news, or good?"

"God knows."

"It's not that Miss Merton has been and changed her mind?"

"It is, my good friend, that your niece Carry is alive and well, and living with her mother at Stockwell."

"Heaven be good to us!—who told you?"

"Mrs. Galbraith herself—break the news to Neal's father. I am going up to Neal."

"Oh! dear!—what's to be done about this new contigimy?" said Mrs. Higgs, seating herself on the stairs, for further reflection, the stairs up which the messenger—for good or for evil—had already ascended.

Mrs. Higgs sat there some time, a long, long time, without further sign of the news creating a stir in the house; then she rose to seek out Mr. Galbraith, senior, who was tottering about the garden that day, enjoying country-life, and picking up all the snails he could find for a favourite blackbird of his grandchild.

Mr. Galbraith, senior, was growing old, and his feelings were aging with him somewhat. News that strikes like an arrow at the hearts of the young, falls like a snow-flake on the old; and it is well and wisely ordered that it should be so.

"Carry living!—what, Neal's wife?"

"Yes—that poor, wilful girl."

"It's surprising! I wonder what Neal will say? We shan't have to hunt about for lodgings all of a hurry now. Poor Carry! I wonder how she managed to make this new mess of affairs! Oh! here's a fat one!"

And Mr. Galbraith, senior, dropped a very choice and full-sized snail into his garden-pot of collections.

"Well, I never saw *much* better than that," said Mrs. Higgs amazed at her master's coolness, and turning away in high dudgeon from him.

She went into the house, and waited at the breakfast table for father and son to take their places there. She enacted the part of humble mistress of the house, until one more fitting moved her from her high position.

She waited a long time there, till Mr. Galbraith, senior, entered. With the collection off his mind, he was inclined to marvel more at the result of the great discovery, and to hope that Neal would take it coolly. He did not see that there had ensued any harm to anybody; but there was no telling in what light Neal would regard the

matter. Neal was so different from other people!

Neal and Pike were heard descending the stairs together. The street door was opened shortly afterwards, and then Pike went down the steps and along the front garden to the high road. Presently Neal came into the room, very white, but very firm.

"My dear young master," began Mrs. Higgs, when he stopped her with a hand stretched out.

"Don't speak of anything that you have heard," he said. "You cannot understand more than I, the nature of it."

"Don't you believe——"

"I am pressed for time," he said, with that old irritability which they had missed, father and housekeeper, for a long period now; "pour me out some tea, as quickly as you can."

The tea was poured out, and remained untasted, until Mrs. Higgs's glance in that direction reminded him of his last request. Then he snatched up the cup, drank the contents, and rose.

"I shall be back presently—in an hour or two, at furthest," he said; he passed from the room, in an instant afterwards from the house.

He went at Mr. Pike's rapid pace, until he was beyond all range of watchers, then he dropped suddenly into a slow progress, and crept, as it were, his way towards the mystery.

He was bewildered, though he had heard all the truth from his partner, and that truth had been conveyed gently, and with a thoughtful man's knowledge of the nature of the person addressed. Neal had feigned not to be quite sure of everything; but he had accepted, almost without a word, the fact that his engagement to Addie was at an end for ever. Mr. Pike had told him that it was best that he should not see her yet awhile; not at all now, he added, gloomily; and Neal had nodded his head in assent, muttering that Pike was right.

He listened, as in a dream, to Pike's recapitulation of the wife's defence, and did not seem to comprehend that part of the subject as clearly as the other. He was not told by Pike—any more than Pike's niece had been told—of the wife's conviction of her early death. The good man shunned that part of the story, thinking it might be the incoherence of an excited woman, and judging that in any case it was better to keep silence. He had told all but that, and Neal had listened patiently

to all, growing paler, but continuing firm. Mr. Pike had wished at last that he would give way more—that stony firmness was not good for Neal, he fancied.

"I shall understand all this better when I have seen her," muttered Neal. "I shall believe it all."

"Believe it!"

"It is like a novel," he said, coldly; "I don't believe it now—it may be founded upon truth, but a story with so many troubles——"

"Neal—this may be a blessing."

"Prove it."

"You don't repent that your wife is living?"

"Do you ask me to rejoice?"

"You have been saved from a great sin."

"Would it not have been better if she had died in earnest?—this poor woman, who has blighted every life with which she has come in contact?"

"We know not what is best."

"We guess easily enough what is the worst that can befall us."

"No. If you covet that woman's death—no!" cried Pike.

Neal shuddered.

"I do not wish her dead—God forgive me! did I say that?"

"There, you know not what you are saying just now," said Mr. Pike; "courage!"

They were his last words, and Neal, as he went towards his wife's home—the address of which Mr. Pike had given him—muttered that word "courage" more than once as he proceeded.

Neal Galbraith found no difficulty in discovering Park Road, Stockwell, or the house of Mrs. Webber, late of Shepherd Street. A house by no means shabby in its externals, and with a wealth of flowers in its front garden calculated to bring old Webber from his cemetery to protest against the expenditure.

Neal felt his heart beating nervously as he raised his hand to the knocker; for the first time since their separation, a man in search of his wife! He scarcely knew even then the nature of the motive that had placed him there, or what hopes or fears he wished verified by the interview he sought. He would be convinced that it was not all a juggle on his senses, before he went back to his home and lonely life again; he had no thought, no wish to take the wife back to his heart. With her living

once more, the thoughts that he had had—thoughts that placed his own wrong foremost, and showed his hardness, perhaps—rose from the grave wherein he had believed they had been sunk for ever!

Neal gave his card to the servant, and asked that it might be taken up to Mrs. Webber's daughter. He could not let the name that he had given her pass his lips at once, but the woman glanced at the card and dropped it in her amazement.

"I beg pardon, sir—I did not know that it was you, I'm sure!"

She picked up the card and hurried away, shortly afterwards returning to usher Neal into the drawing-room—a large well-furnished room at the back of the house.

He had not sat there long, perplexed and gloomy, regretting that the impulse to be stirring had placed him in a position that might tend to his discomfiture, when the door opened, and Mrs. Webber made her appearance.

"Good morning to *you*, sir," she said with emphasis, and with a solemn and impressive curtsey; "it's late in the day to come here, Mr. Galbraith."

"Too late to arrest the further misery of which your daughter has been the cause!"

"Ah! precious miserable you must be to think my gal ain't dead!" said Mrs. Webber; "nobody doubts that."

"Where is she?"

"She will be here presently. She isn't the woman she was, and a little discumfrumples her now—your coming ain't likely to make her any calmer."

"No."

"You ain't come to take her back, I suppose?" she asked anxiously.

Neal shook his head. She had quitted his home of her own free will, and shadowed long years of his life—no, that was the last thought that could ever come to him!

"So much the better," said the old lady; "for you ain't the man to feel comfor'ble with at any time, I take it, and you'd turn the sweets of heaven sour with your black looks. It's my mind I'm speaking, Mr. Galbraith. I ain't got nobody now to make me hold my tongue."

Neal did not pay much heed to her invective; he sat waiting for his wife's appearance, or wishing

now that a message might be sent him that she had not strength to bear his presence, and prayed him to excuse her. He had believed himself a man of greater nerve—able to confront even his dead wife without emotion—and he was fighting hard for a power that should not betray how weak he was. Mrs. Webber's words fell but lightly on his ears; he was conscious of their meaning, but the intensity of their asperity did not affect him. She was a mother, and had her own version of the story; he did not blame her speaking for her child. She was a woman illiterate and vulgar, and the common courtesy of the ignorant he had not expected or required. She was free to abuse him, if it pleased her. She did not know his story, and he did not care to relate it, even in self-defence. Let the woman think the worst of him!

Mrs. Webber was not inclined to be impressed by her son-in-law's indifference. She *was* a woman who spoke her mind now, and in her married life she had had but little chance of that. In her latter days she was making amends for the undue pressure to which she had been subjected, as in the latter days she was making amends for the poor

life in Shepherd Street. She was a widow, whose weeds were costly, and she mourned in style for the defunct Josiah.

"So much the better," she continued, "that you ain't come to take her back. It would be the old game over again in less than no time, and she's quiet here, and only frets a bit at times about her gal. I don't see much to cry about in that, though a gal's a comfort when she's as old as Carry, I must say; and I wouldn't mind coming to see my grandchild when she's bigger, and less tiresome. May I ask what you want here?"

"To see your daughter for an instant," said Neal—"I will not detain her more than an instant, if I can help it."

"She won't be long—she'll get out of it presently."

Mrs. Webber spoke as though Carry were in a bath, and not likely to hurry herself on her husband's account.

"Out of it!" repeated Neal.

"Well, if you must know everything, she's swounded. She's a great bother with her swoundings now, and I'm sure she could help 'em coming on, if she tried, or have 'em quietly when it wasn't

such a bother to everybody else—in the middle of the night, say! But I've had a good deal to worry me all my life, and I shan't see the end of worry till they lump me a-top of Webber in the simitary! He would be brought to London—he left it in his will so—I never met with a man who wanted so much waiting on!"

The mention of Mr. Webber's will suddenly appeared to sharpen the faculties of Mrs. Webber's relict. She gave a tug to her widow's cap, to settle it more firmly on her head, and then drew her chair, by rapid little jerks, closer to our hero.

"I think I just begin to see why you've come here, young sir," she said, in that manner generally designated 'knowing,' "and it'll make matters shorter if I undeceive you. You want your wife's money now, praps?"

"Madam!" said Neal, startled from his apathy by this allusion.

"It'd be a fine thing to work with and throw away on them cold blaster dodges which I've heard on, but you can't," she said, triumphantly; "Webber was too 'cute to be taken in by you. It's all settled on herself—tied up in a tangle, so that

even she can't make it over, and after her death it goes to Joe, who'll have about spent his own by that time in theyaters. There isn't a penny to be gained by coming here, and upsetting house and home in this fashion!"

"Is it worth while saying that I have not thought of Mr. Webber's money?" said Neal, more listlessly.

"It isn't much. I shan't believe you, for one; she may, if you tell her, and if you think it's worth the telling."

"I am not here to speak of money, or to defend the honesty of my intentions," said Neal, betraying a little irritability beneath the constant attacks of this old woman.

"You can tell Mrs. Higgs—and whatever made her throw herself away in slaving all her life for two March hares, I never shall make out!—that I'm her sister still, and she might think so now and then, and come and see me. I don't say it's her gratitude to do so, or her duty, mind; and if she thinks it right to slight me, let her!"

Mrs. Webber, having started a fresh subject, would have expatiated at some length on her sister's ill-treatment of her, had not the handle of

the door turned, and given warning of the wife's arrival. There was some whispering outside, a voice suggesting further help, and another—*hers* —refusing it, and then Mrs. Galbraith came slowly into the room, and turned towards the visitor.

Neal rose instinctively, and slightly bowed his head—the wife imitating his movement, and then sinking into a chair by the centre table, on which she rested a thin white hand.

It was a strange meeting after that wild night at Nottingham, when, moved by a passionate fear, she had flung herself at his feet; this was a woman whom he had never seen before—a very calm, shadowy-looking woman, whose face was grave and solemn, and about whom rested a dignity that awed the man before her. What struggle there had been to look like that, and face him with that coldness, only Carry Galbraith knew!

"I did not expect the honour of this visit," she said at last.

"Madam, it was not to be expected," said Neal, in the same low, repressed tones which she had assumed; "it is scarcely to be accounted for. This morning an old friend, on whom you called

last night, apprised me of the news with which you startled him."

"Bad news enough," commented Carry; "but not to be avoided. He told you all my reasons for the act?"

"All."

"You will believe—you will try and believe, perhaps," she corrected, "that there was no malice in them? It did not strike me," she went on after a pause, "that you would so quickly resolve upon bettering your state, or I would not have added by my actions to so mortifying a discomfiture."

"I have not come for your excuses—or your satire, Mrs. Galbraith," said Neal, after a pause on his part.

"Sir, I am not inclined to be satirical—you mistake me, even now."

"It is possible."

He was silent again for awhile, and neither mother nor daughter broke the stillness in that room. Once Mrs. Webber made a movement as though to speak, but Carry checked her with an uplifted hand, and it was Neal whose voice reverberated first there.

"I came to be quite certain that I was not the dupe of other people's senses," said Neal; "convinced thus, I have only to withdraw. Meetings between you and me must be always painful, and to prolong them is to add torture to us both!"

"One moment."

He had moved a step towards the door, when Carry's quick words—the words more natural to her manner—arrested his retirement.

"You are sorry that I live?—it has come even to that!"

"Pardon me—that is an injustice—the last of a long series."

"I am—very glad—to hear that!"

Neal would have withdrawn now, but she added—

"Another moment, sir. This is more important," she said; "we may never meet again—in all probability you and I will never look into each other's face again, and I must speak to you."

"Not of the past—it is forgiven, if you will—but it is sealed down!"

"The past!" she uttered passionately; "we have both done with it."

"What subject, then——" began Neal.

"The future, Mr. Galbraith—*my* future. It is not a long one—it must not be wholly dark—I have your promise to see my little girl?"

"To see her—well?"

"It was part of our compact when I broke my heart and gave her up," said the wife; "it must not be cancelled in bad faith. That child, sir, is my heart's blood, and you have no more right to keep her from me, than to take my life!"

"You will consider the harm that this may end in?"

"The good to me—and I am selfish in this matter. The good to my daughter, to whom I can offer a mother's love, and teach her, by the story of a mother's faults, the duties of her aftertime. I will entreat you, humbly and earnestly, to keep your word with me!"

"If you claim its fulfilment, it must be so."

"I claim it, then," she said; "I would have my daughter know her mother again—and I will try—oh! so hard—to win that old love back once more. Mr. Galbraith," she said rising, "I thank you gratefully for this—I will be ever grateful for a

kindness that shall do no harm to you, and shall offer for a little while to me a glimpse of heaven!"

Neal's heart thrilled at this woman's thanks —thanks for her share of her own child! That heart was troubled, too, but he could not sift to the bottom of the many thoughts there. In the midst of them, there was a jealous fear that his daughter would love him less after she had met her mother—and that with his consent, he made one step back, as it were, towards that dreadful past, against all allusion to which he had protested that day.

It was a meeting that had ended in a manner unforeseen, and the result was yet to come. In her impulse, in her excess of gratitude—that mother's pleasure, which forgot all else, and sank the errors of her life away—she held her hand towards her husband, but he did not take it. It was scarcely apparent whether he had detected the outstretched hand or not; he had bowed slightly again, and moved towards the door, and Carry's arm had fallen very quickly to her side.

Between them ever that one false step, which the husband would never forgive—which it was

his duty to society NOT to pardon! He had spoken of forgiveness to her, but it was in cold, hard tones, such as could have never escaped the lips of mercy, and he bore his wrong nearest his proud heart still, as the Spartan bore his fox. It would gnaw him to the death, but he would cherish it—there seemed no power on earth, or in heaven, to change this man of iron.

Neal went from the room, Mrs. Webber following him to the door.

"The child shall be brought here now and then by Mrs. Higgs," he said.

"As often as you can let her come, praps?"

"I said now and then!"

"I don't want her for myself—I'm not fond of children," said Mrs. Webber; "but it would make her happy enough, and not hurt you, that I can see."

Neal turned upon her almost fiercely.

"The child must not be spoiled," he said, "or a word said against me, or she comes no more. Take my warning to your daughter, and remember that I shall be ever watchful!"

He went away homewards, at the same slow, thoughtful pace, thinking of the meeting with his

wife, and whether much harm would come of it. The shadow had lain too long and heavily upon him to believe in any good result.

END OF BOOK THE SIXTH.

BOOK VII.

LOOKING FORWARD.

CHAPTER I.

MAMMA.

IT had been the one wish of Mr. Pike that Neal should not see his niece again, and Neal had assented to his wish. For a little while—a year or two even—Mr. Pike had considered that they should not meet. Addie was strong—oh! very strong, and able to bear up against the shock, and see clearly how it had all happened for the best!—but there would be painful reminiscences conjured up by the meeting of two whose loves had been so innocently dishonest. Mr. Pike thought this; Neal did not.

Neal believed that he could take his place in their midst again, and be even the brother that he was before the courting days. With Carry's resurrection there came back all his past thoughts, and Addie Merton seemed very far away then—a something that he had dreamed about, but

which had left his heart on waking. He could love Addie as a sister, welcome her at his house with her uncle unmoved; talk with her even about Carry, and Carry's child, and follow her advice concerning that new care to which meetings between them had given birth. He protested all this, and Mr. Pike might have believed his protestations, but he did not put them to the test.

Addie was not fretting at the dissipation of her love-thoughts; she was gathering strength slowly, and, to all outward seeming, was becoming the woman she had ever been—a trifle graver, at times, as people are who have escaped a danger. Mr. Pike had had enough of experiments, and Neal and Addie had better keep apart, he considered. They were both strong, and both young, and neither, thank Heaven, was inclined to give way.

For little Carry Galbraith there began a life of oscillation between Streatham and Stockwell—a new life, at which she flinched at first, but loved very speedily. Mrs. Higgs was her escort to the mother's house, bringing happiness and joy to the niece whom she had not seen for many years, and whom to see now, so frail and delicate, was to be shocked at very much.

"My poor Carry!—my poor, wilful gal! Oh! if I could have altered all this, ever so long ago!"

"Never mind, now—what does it matter?" Carry would say, anxious to dismiss the subject; "it appertains to 'long ago,' and here's my child to comfort me for all the bygones!"

She only needed the love of little Carry to make her life bright, the mother said, and watching her with the child, was for Mrs. Webber and the aunt to believe her. To all the rest of her life resigned enough, and verging, at the last, upon contentment. It did not take long for little Carry to call the lady "Mother," or for the mother to win back the daughter's love. The child had had a fitful gleam of what a young woman's love was like when Addie Merton nursed her—but what a mother's love resembled, she had forgotten. At that time it was only to be realized in its entirety; and here was a mother whom she went to see, who had no other thought in life but to love her—to hold her to her heart, and lavish upon her all its wealth!

They were soul-absorbent moments, when mother and child were together—even stout-hearted Mrs. Higgs and callous Mrs. Webber felt the holiness of them, and intruded not. Whenever Carry was

brought to Stockwell, it was understood that it was for the matter alone she came, and that no interference were to be attempted between them. The mother for the child, and the child for the mother, until it was time for little Carry to go home, and tell her father what a holiday it had been with poor mamma!

The father listened carefully to all the details of the meeting, strangely interested in the minor incidents of his child's life—strangely watchful and even suspicious. But the girl loved her father none the less, he thought; and no one at that house at Stockwell had said one word against him *yet!* So the time went on, and once again people were talking of the early winter—that was to be hard and severe that year, the prophets said.

In the winter little Carry was taken home before the night set in, and the mother sorrowed for the difference it made. The mother was growing weaker, and the summer time, she thought, would never come for her again; the long summer days, when little Carry was not expected home till nine o'clock! Once the mother suggested to Mrs. Higgs that the child might remain a day or two;

suggested timidly the question, balked at once by her aunt's sorrowful dissent.

"I have already had my orders, Carry," said Mrs. Higgs.

"But it is raining?"

"I am to hire a fly whenever the rains come, and, under any 'cumstances, the child must go."

"What does Mr. Galbraith fear?"

"I cant't say—he never tells me. But he always warns me that the gal must come back."

"Very well, then."

Carry seldom asked questions of her aunt, or mentioned Neal's name to her. It was understood that the subject was forbidden, and only pain could ensue from it. Forbidden in that house the name of Neal, for Carry's sake, as all mention of the wife's name was avoided in the husband's.

But Carry asked questions of her child—many questions, to which the child innocently responded. Carry was interested in that unknown home where Neal was, in Neal's life, and in the friends he had made. Concerning the friends she was very curious, and there lingered the old failing about her better life still.

"You see Miss Merton now and then, my dar-

ling?" she asked one day when they were together, the table heaped with toys—many of them rare and costly—and little Carry was perched on a chair with her treasures before her.

"Not now."

"Never?""

"Oh! never now—I don't know why, mamma—she was so fond of me!"

"She said so, perhaps."

"And was to have been my mamma Addie, pa said once. Why, how was that?"

"When you are a big woman, pa will tell you. You wouldn't understand now."

"There are many things I'd like to know about you and pa," said the child thoughtfully.

"Some day—some day. And were you fond of Addie Merton?"

"Oh! yes."

"Not so fond of her as of—papa?"

"Not quite."

"Or—me?" she asked with a strong effort.

"Oh! no, no—no one like my dear mamma!"

The mother's arms were round her, and the tears were falling very heavily; this was something to be grateful for at last, and yet there were times

when these meetings seemed but to show her loneliness in a graver and more awful light.

From mother and father in their separate homes this cross-questioning went on for a time, and Neal saw the elements of danger in it. He would not speak of them yet, and, after a while, he forebore on his part to ask the child what had been said to her. He was content to think that not a word was ever spoken against him, and if the child would love him just as well, why, the mother need never upbraid him for his promise-breaking. But let the child evince a preference for *her*, or show, by some new trait of character, a difference however small, and he must care no more for promises. He was still very watchful of results, for his soul was in his daughter's welfare, and in the future he should have only her to live for.

Now and then a question escaped him in spite of himself. In the winter time he said to little Carry,

"Are there ever any visitors to your mamma's house?"

"A gentleman sometimes."

Neal was astonished at his own spasm, but went on.

"What kind of gentleman?"

"A funny man, who makes me laugh, and tells me that he is my uncle Joe. I like him—rather," she added reflectively.

"No one else?"

"No one. Mamma could not see them—people worry her, she says."

"Indeed!" remarked Neal.

"I shall be glad when summer comes, papa."

"Why?"

"Ma will be stronger, she tells me. We're both waiting for the summer."

"It will come before we are prepared for it, Carry. You," pulling her curls, "must not be in a hurry to run through life, my girl. In the winter you are more with me, remember."

"Yes," said the child.

Neal was waiting for the offence against him then, but it came not, and there was no excuse yet to strike for his own share of affection.

That night the task lay before him of warding off a question which had more than once risen to little Carry's lips, and was always ready to be fenced with. A question that came suddenly to father and to mother at times, stabbing each heart

in turn—the natural inquiry why two she loved so dearly could not be together like other pa's and ma's that had been pointed out to her.

"It is for the best, Carry," Neal would say hastily; "and your ma has a mamma of her own to take care of, and I a father."

Neal would hurry away after so sorry an explanation, and Carry would brood upon the answer, and try to reconcile it with the facts about her, and bide her time to non-plus Mrs. Higgs or grandpapa.

If it had not been for Neal's watchfulness of his child's love, the anxiety with which he waited for one sign—and which must come inevitably from a child with a doting mother—this passing of little Carry from house to house might have softened harder hearts than Neal's, and led to a something more than sympathy. His thoughts were difficult to understand and reconcile with each other; even to him there came a wish sometimes that he could consider his wife justified in coming back to him; and then a thought that she was still unwise and revengeful, nursing the first foolish idea, with all the uncharitableness of a mind distorted by one fallacy. Then he would shun all thought and

doubt his own wishes, their depth and value—and from the past echoed some bitter words which he had treasured up, and which, forgetting not, would ever sting him. Yes, this man was terribly unforgiving—he had marked out his own path, and he would follow it to the end.

What were the mother's thoughts at this period were never whispered to one confidant. Judging Neal's character by an awful retrospect, seeing her folly clearly and repenting of it, still she had no hope. If she were sorry for Neal's wasted life, there was no atonement on her side that he would think befitting or sufficient, and it was beyond her strength to offer any. All the pardon of which that stern man thought his wife deserving, had been extended when the rare privilege of seeing her own child was granted her.

"Do you think papa is happy?" she asked little Carry once, carried away by an impulse to speak of him again.

"Happy?—how?" said the child.

"Happy like you are."

"Oh! no. When he plays with me, he smiles a little—not always. And he is so fond of thinking —sitting like this, mamma—with his forehead all

rucked up—I wish that I could show you how."

"I can guess, dear."

"Grandpa, or Mrs. Higgs, when they see him looking like that, send me to talk to him."

"They are very kind," said the mother with a sigh.

Then the toys were brought out, and the deeper subject was dismissed.

CHAPTER II.

PEACE-MAKERS.

CARRY GALBRAITH was to be troubled by an unexpected visitor before the depth of winter set in. No less a visitor than Mr David Pike, who sent in his card, and requested the favour of a few minutes conference.

Carry had visitors already that night—friends that had not yet left her; the old friends who had been kindest to her in her desolation for her own sake—Joe Webber and his gigantic wife. For the first time we meet these latter almost in prosperous circumstances—or rather at a time before the adverse elements common to all Joe's undertakings had set fairly in. Joe was looking well and getting stout, and to see Joe in that condition, in a black velvet waistcoat, loaded with twelve ounces of gold chain—Joe clean, fresh

shaven, and unfuddled, was a sight worth waiting all these chapters for.

Mrs. Webber was thinner than ever, with anxiety concerning the new business, the properties, the company, and the receipts; but she was in black velvet also, and looked queenly, if slim. The family circle of the Webbers was complete, and Mr. Pike was introduced into its midst, with an unceremoniousness that embarrassed him for a moment.

"I beg pardon, Mrs. Galbraith," he said; "but I was not aware that you had visitors. I was anxious to see if you were well, and have taken the liberty of calling upon you for that purpose."

"I am as well as I ever expect to be," she said, somewhat coldly; "I hope that you are in not a very great hurry, Mr. Pike."

She was half-reclining on a sofa near the fire, pillowed carefully, and looking but the shadow of Neal's wife. In the twilight, when she had called upon him in her walking-dress, the change in her had not struck him so acutely.

"In a hurry—for what?" asked Mr. Pike, innocently.

"For Miss Merton's marriage."

David Pike crimsoned to the roots of his hair, and said with more warmth than he was accustomed in excited moments to exhibit—

"I have never thought of that since, Mrs. Galbraith. You do me an injustice. But then," with that naive conceit that did not set ill upon him, for it was exhibited so rarely, "you do not know me."

"I am harsh—I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Galbraith; "but invalids are licensed to be querulous. You and I were very good friends in our day, sir—and you have done me more than one good turn. No—I do not think that *you* would rejoice at my death much!"

"No one of my acquaintance would, I am assured. No one whom I know is even aware of your delicate state of health."

"May I ask why you are here to-night?"

"For the reason that we were good friends once—and that you are a woman who has suffered much."

"And is still suffering!"

"I am sorry to hear that. I had come hither with a hope to find you resigned—patient—for-

giving. You will pardon me, even to intrude upon you even with a few good words, and attempt in my way some little consolation."

It was noticed then that he carried a small Bible in his hand, and that there were several tracts peeping out of the pockets of his coat.

"We have plenty of people who deal in consolation," observed Mrs. Webber, "without coming to you for it. And if my gal is to die—which I don't think, for weak chests isn't in the family—it's as well not to aggerivate her with more preaching than comes in from the corner-place. It's out of your way, and out of our line."

"I have many good friends, Mr. Pike," said Carry, more courteously; "and I am not neglectful of my Bible. Still for all good wishes, let me thank you."

"I had come, too, to ask if you would allow a lady of whom you have spoken harshly, to see you presently. She is very anxious."

Carry's brow lowered just a little, and Pike saw it.

"Oh! Mrs. Galbraith, I think it is unjust to bear an ill-feeling in your heart against the best of girls."

"I have no reason to gratefully remember her," said Carry; "I would rather not see her any more."

"It is her wish."

"Not yours?"

"And mine, too."

"Why does she wish to see *me*?" asked Carry; "what good to her or me can ensue from such an interview?"

"I hope a little good."

"Let her come, if she will," said Carry impatiently. "I think, upon consideration," she added more thoughtfully, "that I should like to say a few words to her."

Mr. Pike hastened to withdraw before Carry's resolution should waver; with his love of tract-distributing, he dropped a new exordium, by Mr. Hedger, in the hall, and then hurried away. He was half a mile from the house when someone, panting very much, touched him on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, sir," said Joseph Webber, for it was he who had followed Mr. Pike, "it's a pull to fetch up to you, when you've made up your mind to step out—especially as I'm stouter than I used

to be. But I want to talk to you about my sister Carry."

"I am at your service."

Joe Webber passed his arm confidentially through Mr. Pike's, and the two walked on together in this amicable conjunction. People fond of gossip—prying people, always on the alert—made note of this circumstance, and tried to damage Mr. Pike's character by asserting that it was *rather* out of place for an elder of a chapel—and Mr. Pike was an elder now—to be walking about the streets arm-in-arm with the lessee of a theatre; but the fact, though conclusive, never troubled Mr. Pike to make out his defence.

"You're the very chap I've been wanting to get hold of," Joseph Webber said; "for you know that Galbraith fellow best of all of us; and I've a good idea about him and Carry."

"Eh?"

"To bring them together, just as a wind-up, like the last scene in a melo-drama!"

"I don't know anything about the last scenes of melo-dramas, sir."

"I wish a few more of you chaps did—it would make business brisker."

"To bring Neal and his wife together! Dear me! it is very singular that *that* idea should have struck you too!"

"It struck me all of a heap, I can tell you!"

Mr. Pike did not understand that particular form of striking, but he nodded his head, as though he did.

"I never was a very feeling cove," said Joe—"I never wanted to be, or the preponderance of kicks over halfpence would have settled me long since. I've been a rough one, and I've had to rough it in the roughest times, caring for nobody but myself. Bnt I never roughed it in all my blessed life as Carry has."

"Poor woman!"

"Poor devil!" added Joe, to Mr. Pike's horror. "Why, I couldn't bear to see her fighting for life, she and her child, and trying to be too proud to *show* what she felt, and always moaning out how wrong she had been to run away."

"Sorry, then?"

"She has been sorry enough; and it was only I who could keep her from going mad, by talking of the times a-coming. Well, here they are—bright ones in their way—though I'm not particularly dazzled yet myself."

"I have thought of this also, Mr. Webber."

"Joe's more sociable, sir. The other thing don't fit."

"I have thought of this, Joe," corrected Pike; "but the mists are heavy, and I don't see my way through them."

"Is that man as obstinate as ever, then?—after all this time, now he's collared the child, too!"

"He has never spoken of the subject—and I, his best friend, have scarcely thought it prudent to introduce it."

"Nor would I," said Joe, "if she could have a bit of happiness without him; but she can't. Nor more would I now, if there was just a chance of her living to get old, of her living to get over it, or of anything but her slipping away from us. But when it comes to dying, and she has never done him any harm—for the real harm fell to her share——"

"Justly," added Pike, "for he loved her very dearly."

"Then I think that it might be better for him and her to make it up. At all events, for him to see her, and not to let her go out of the world thinking that he never will forgive her. Damme, sir!

if that's a chapel trick, I'm proud of being Church of England!"

"Are you in the habit of swearing so much as this?" asked Mr. Pike, more shocked than ever.

"Not quite so much, perhaps."

"I'll send you round a paper in the morning that will astonish you."

"Thankee!" said Joe; "but let us settle this other affair over-night, if we can. Here's a place where we can have a glass together, and talk it over quietly. Come on, sir!"

"No!—oh, no, thank you! I don't see how it can be settled, Mr. Webber," said Pike, increasing his pace past the "place" indicated. "Neither husband nor wife has ever expressed a wish to wholly set aside the past—for the husband I can answer."

"Words are nothing—Carry has said nothing," said Joe; "but I think I see what is best, and if you won't make the effort, I will."

"You?"

"I don't see why not, sir," said Joe, doggedly. "Carry has always stuck by me, and I shall keep to her, now she hasn't the chance to help herself. I shall speak my mind to Galbraith."

"I would certainly advise you not."

"I'm not afraid of him, Mr. Pike, great gun as he is!" said Joe. "He has been too upright to please anyone but himself—and if he has done that, it's a wonder! I gave him a lift once, and now it is his place to make me compensation."

"A lift?"

"Well, he thought so at that time, although things have taken a different complexion," said Joe. "I stood his friend when he was anxious to marry Carry, and I gave him the run of my premises when Carry was living with me, and I helped him to get his license, and assisted at his marriage, giving a family countenance to the whole affair?"

"Ahem! I don't think that I would mention those obligations under which Mr. Galbraith labours."

"It has been an unlucky marriage—but not all her fault, sir."

"It's not worth arguing about."

"You would keep him away from Carry, perhaps?"

"No. I think it would be best that they should meet again."

"And you'll try and bring that about?"

"I will."

"Then I need not interfere. You'll do your best for the girl, now, won't you?"

"I certainly will."

"You're a good sort!" said Joe, confidently; "and if I ever can be of service to you, you've only to say so."

"Thank you."

"You go to theatres *sometimes*, perhaps?"

"Theatres!—Never!"

"*Never!* What, never see a good play? Not a play with such first-rate talent in it that there's a mob outside the house before the doors open?"

Mr. Pike responded in the negative.

"It's a pity in a man of your years!" said Joe, with feeling. "It would have done you more good than you fancy. I asked the question, because your name is on the free-list of my establishment from this very night!"

"My dear sir, I——"

"A free list, which however entirely suspended, the public press excepted, shall not be closed against the name of Pike!"

"But I never, on any account——"

"To oblige me, perhaps you'll come and see the Investment as *Helen Macgregor*, who was naturally tall, sir, and, indeed, formidable. And if you won't come—why, there are plenty of your friends will, and they have only to mention your name; it's not much of a return," said Joe, after a little reflection, "but it's all I can do, at present, for your interest in Carry, for which I *do* thank you, with all the heart that a great deal of 'knocking about' has left me."

He shook hands with Pike very warmly, hoping again that Pike would do his best to bring about a meeting, and then strutted away to his theatre, to count the numbers in "the house."

Mr. Pike went home to detail the result of his mission to Addie—to think, long after that, of the best means to bring about a meeting, even a fugitive kind of reconciliation. If it were a parting between them—a parting for ever!—still Neal might be thankful to look back upon it, in the days to come. But he did not know how terribly hard Neal was to move—or what had happened to Neal in the interim to balk a well-meant project.

Neal was not at business the next day, and Mr. Pike went in search of him in the evening. He found his partner shut up in his study, writing busily.

Neal laid aside his pen to welcome his friend.

"I was writing to you. This is a coincidence," he said.

"Writing to me, Neal? Why, should I not have seen you to-morrow?"

"I shall be busy to-morrow, preparing for a little journey. I have not had much change in my life, or seen much society of late years—I begin to awaken to the consciousness of growing old-fashioned."

"You were writing to me?"

"To tell you this—to let you know that I leave to-morrow night at twelve for the Continent. To ask you to spare me for one month, or two—three even, if the humour suit me—and not to consider me too selfish in abandoning you at this busy time."

"I can always spare you, Neal," said Pike, thoughtfully—"spare you more heartily when I feel assured that you are going for your good. But this is a very sudden resolution—and candidly I don't quite understand it."

"There is no mystery, old friend. I really require change of scene; I have been brooding too much, and it has affected my health."

"You are unsettled again?"

"No. To everything before me I am resigned."

"And to the past—and all the troubles in it—resigned also?"

"Yes, I hope so. That is a part of my duty."

"You go alone?"

Neal did not answer, and Mr. Pike repeated his question.

"Alone? yes—unless you call my little Carry company."

"What!—you would take that child?"

"Surely I would not leave her here. Would you advise me?"

"For her mother's sake—yes."

Neal shook his head.

"No," he said at last.

"My dear Neal," urged his partner, "have you really considered this step?"

"I have considered every step, and whither it leads. I have made up my mind."

"Why, even for your own sake——"

"Pardon me, but for my child's sake I am going."

"Are you sure?"

"I see a difference in her—I have been waiting for it, and it has come at last. The child is altering, has been too long at home, and has had too much of her own way lately. I have been recommended a foreign school for her."

"At her age?—oh, Neal!"

"She is not too young—if school disagree with her, she will be brought back at once. But it is an experiment worth trying, before conflicting elements utterly spoil her."

"May I ask what you mean, Neal, by 'conflicting elements'?"

"They are easily guessed at."

"The father's love—and the mother's?"

"Yes."

Mr. Pike had been waiting for this opportunity to speak, and he seized it on the instant. Seized it, as it were, in that face of despair, which spoke of Neal's determination to depart. He had not much hope of any good result, but he would do his duty, fearing no rebuff. Neal would hear more from him than from any one else in the world.

"They should not be opposed—they should not make this child one more harsh memory between the parents. Surely enough of opposition, cruel and unvarying, *has* ensued."

"Surely!" answered Neal.

"Why deprive the mother of her child, then?"

"Because that child is *my* happiness—all that is left me in the present or future. Because, despite every effort of my own, I am loved second-best, and the mother comes between me and all that I hold dear. I will not have that!"

Neal's face expressed his determination then, and Mr. Pike's trust in his own influence fell to zero.

"You did not wish little Carry to love her mother, then?" he asked.

"Not *first of all!* The mother has benighted my past sufficiently, without weaning away the affections of my daughter. 'Carry, you will always love me best, and think of me with your best love,' she told the child a day or two ago; and the child loves her already, and turns away from me. For ever an incessant cry for the mother's side, one mortifying appeal to get away from this house! I am a jealous man—and I will not have it!"

"This is not like you, Neal. This is childish."

"I am becoming childish," was Neal's answer.

"And this is inconsiderate and—wrong."

"Still I have made up my mind, and there is nothing on earth to change it."

"In your place, I would have thought of the mother a little more," said Pike, "of a desolation deeper than your own, of a life that has made atonement for its one grave error, and will not trouble any one much longer—not even herself."

"What do you mean?" asked Neal.

"That she is a poor weak woman, whom a breath may injure—a woman who has suffered much, and should not meet a desperate affliction at the eleventh hour like this. Neal, she cannot live!"

"She was always a delicate woman in appearance," he answered, "and she will live, I hope and believe, many years yet."

"You hope?"

"Yes—I do not begrudge her one minute of her mis-spent life—I would have her live to think more penitently of the past—to see her child a woman in the future, a woman that shall teach her by example in what life's duties honestly consist."

"Still thinking of the wrong!"

"I have not forgotten it—but, Pike, I have forgiven it."

"No."

"I have forgiven it," he reiterated, "with all my heart! I was not free from blame—I was more hard and stern than the facts warranted, and I leaped at conclusions which, thank God, were false enough! But I cannot forget her revenge, and whilst my child is very young—impressionable and weak, I will not have a reckless mother exert an influence unwittingly for evil."

"You have forgiven the past?" said Mr. Pike, once more, as though the asseveration were not to be believed yet.

"I have said so."

"Tell that unhappy woman so, Neal Galbraith," said Mr. Pike, with energy, "lest she die before you come back from this useless journey, and die believing in your want of charity."

"I have told her—I have shown it by my actions; I have let her even steal my daughter's love away from me."

He came back to the old subject, as though it was a fresh indignity hurled against his pride.

"And envious of your child's love for the mother, you render daughter, mother, father—all unhappy!"

"For that daughter's sake—that daughter who will be more grateful when her years are older."

"I would not take the child away without seeing the mother even now," again remarked Mr. Pike; "I tell you that she has no faith in your forgiveness, and that it would fill her heart with joy at the last to hear you say so."

"No words of mine, sir, can give her joy ever again."

"They can, Neal."

"Take them to her then—you, the mediator!"

"Ah! they must be spoken by yourself."

"I shall never see her."

"Well—well," said Mr. Pike, with a sigh; "what shall I say to her? Think over your kindest and best words, and they shall be delivered to her. I had a hope—not a very intense one—that you and she might shake hands, and let one roof cover you again; but that dissipated—what shall I say to Mrs. Galbraith?"

Neal sat and thought. He had coloured at the mention of Mr. Pike's hope, and then his brow

had contracted, and his face assumed its old repellent aspect, mingled with a look of anxiety that was new there.

"I scarcely understand this sudden interest in her," said Neal; "when did you see her last?"

"Yesterday."

"Did she mention me?—my unforgiveness?—her anxiety to feel assured that I bore no malice in my heart against her?"

"Her brother did—not herself."

"Her brother has been a liar from his cradle."

"Neal, are you too proud to send kind words to a despairing woman?"

"She will think me very foolish," he murmured; "but if you wish it, be it so."

He thought again, then started up suddenly, and began to pace the room, speaking with great rapidity.

"Tell her that I am about to take our child away, thinking it better for little Carry to be carefully, religiously, and even strictly brought up. That I have no power to make my child all that is good, and that for that child's sake—only *her* sake—I take her away for awhile, sacrificing my happiness as well as the mother's. You need not

pain her, Pike, by saying that I fear her influence over the daughter might do harm—that was between you and me, and uttered hastily. Tell her, too," he added, still more rapidly, "that she shall see that child in the holiday seasons—that I have not withdrawn my promise—that I can feel for her deprivation; but that once more, for the child's sake, I assert that it is best. And add this—that if she think there be any forgiveness needed for that fatal step which took her from my home, and cast suspicions on her which the world will never take away, that forgiveness is granted freely. I see her life clearly from that day to this—her weakness, wilful pride, and misery—I pity and forgive it—I, who need forgiveness myself! Assure her that I might have been more generous, and she more patient, but that it was not fated to be otherwise, and in testing us too much, God set us irrevocably apart. Apart thus, I have been a colder, harder, and worse man, and that it is only lately that I have learned my errors with her own. There, I have said enough, I think!"

"Neal, you love this poor woman still?"

"No more! No talk of love to me, or of anything better and brighter than this day! I am

resigned, I tell you! I have sobered down to working life, with you to thank for it. You will not vex me any more by this obtrusiveness!"

"If you would only believe in your wife's fading life, and of the happiness that you might afford her at the last by speaking to her as you have done to me."

Neal turned fiercely upon him.

"*I will not go!*"

Mr. Pike accepted that answer as final, and went sorrowfully away; he had done his best, but he was scarcely satisfied with the result.

CHAPTER III.

A LAST EFFORT.

CARRY GALBRAITH made preparations to receive her visitor—preparations that were not made outwardly. Carry was weak, and found great difficulty in moving now; the doctor hemmed her in with a hundred cautions, and though she kept but fifty of them, still the restrictions wearied and perplexed her. Even in her latter days, she fretted against restraint, and confinement to the house all that dreary winter had not rendered her composed.

It was this effort at composure which was the major part of Carry's preparations; she could not think of Miss Merton with that charity she held, or thought that she held, to all the rest of the world, and yet there was even a longing to be at peace with *her*. Miss Merton had been the

rival of her life; she had ever stood between her and her husband; she would marry that husband, and take away her dear child's love from her before her grave was green! But there would be in the future an immensity of power to make or mar the happiness of Neal and little Carry, and she would like to hear from the lips of the rival an assurance that that happiness would not be destroyed by any want of thought.

What Addie Merton desired of her was not to the purport, and did not trouble her. She might wish forgiveness herself, or desire to weary her with preachings common to her sect, and common in themselves—but that did not matter. She had a vague desire that good would follow from their interview, and she waited, not too patiently, for the advent of Miss Merton.

Carry had expected Addie the day following Mr. Pike's visit, but she came not. The next day the heavy slanting rain, fierce and incessant, seemed to give evidence of no intrusion till the morrow. Carry came down late that day, more weak than she had been all the winter through, and took her place in the capacious, deeply-pillowed chair.

"I'm glad that we shall be alone to-day," she

said to her mother; "I don't know if I feel strong enough for visitors."

"Lor bless the child, you're strong enough!" said Mrs. Webber; "it's only the weather, and the worry. You've had a deal to try you, and now it's telling on you, but the wust is over."

"Yes—I think it is."

"And as for you getting weaker and weaker, why, it's nonsense. Do you think it at all likely, Carry, that an old woman like me is to be left alone in the world, and you, young still, to go afore me? Why, it ain't nat'ral!"

"I don't think that you should look upon my going in a light like that," said Carry; "you should be glad!"

"Glad!—why, *you* haven't been a torment to me for no end of years!"

"Glad that I shall be free from all the troubles of a life made dark by my own wilfulness. Free from the misconceptions of those who might think more charitably of me, now the hour is late!"

"Before I'd think anything more of *him*, I'd be shot!" cried Mrs. Webber.

Carry closed her eyes, to shut out, as it were, her mother's asperities, and they were silent for

some time—until the visitor whom they had not expected that afternoon announced her presence at that house.

"You will leave us, mother; it is necessary that I should speak to Miss Merton alone."

"If I can't be trusted, to be sure I will," and Mrs. Webber departed, after this muttered remonstrance.

In a few minutes the two young women were face to face again; theirs had been ever strange meetings, marred by much want of sympathy, and this was the strangest of them all!

"I did not expect you on so inauspicious a day," said Carry; "but you are welcome."

"I am glad to hear you say that."

"Nay, you are very welcome," she added; "for I have a great deal on my mind, and this may be the only chance of relating it to you. Miss Merton, we have never been good friends—there was a something in me, or a something in you, that kept us ever apart—an instinctive enmity!"

"No enmity on my side, Mrs. Galbraith."

"Ah! you will not confess it! But there *was*—there must have been!"

"Why?"

"My husband was turning against me, and learning to love you. You know that now!"

"Madam! I have never known it!—it was not to be known—it was an idea conceived only by a jealous woman!"

Addie had forgotten her mission, in her indignation. They were ever to exchange angry words, these rival heroines of ours.

"If I have been deceived all my life!" murmured Carry; "if I could hope so now!"

"You will acquit me of so vile a thought, Mrs. Galbraith?"

"Is there any telling where love begins?—at what epoch in our lives it first steals into the heart, a curse or blessing, as God decrees? There must have been on his part—there might have been on yours—some hopes akin to those which were in existence a little while ago!"

"Mrs. Galbraith, it is this estimate of others that has worked such harm to you."

"I will try and think better of you all," said Carry, very wearily; "I have never been a shrewd woman—I may be wrong, and I care not to continue the subject. But," added she, with a suddenness that was startling, "you love him now?"

Addie changed colour, and was silent.

"I am not wrong, Miss Merton?"

"I love him as a brother very dear to me," she said, at last. "I had learned to love him with my whole heart, believing that his happiness lay with me alone, and that to my hands would fall the task of cheering him. Mrs. Galbraith, as a sister—say even more than a sister—I shall always be to him now, but I shall never marry him!"

"No, no—you must not say that!" cried Carry.

"Mrs. Galbraith!" exclaimed Addie.

Carry was herself again—wild, earnest, and impassionate.

"I say that you must not tell me this," Carry said; "that power to cheer Neal's future will remain to you when I am gone, and you must do your best. He is young, and the life before him must not be wholly desolate. By-and-bye, he will come to you again, and remind you of a past engagement, and you must not stand back in your pride, or cast him down with it. Miss Merton, you must be his wife!"

"Never, Mrs. Galbraith."

"I think that you will," said Carry, urgently.

"I want you to sit here with me, and think of it also. If I were to die, believing that to his side there would steal never a comforter again, and that you, a good wife, would not make reparation for me, a bad one, I should die very, very sorrowful!"

Addie sat amazed at this entreaty—at this variable nature, turning to her, of all women in the world!

"Mrs. Galbraith, I beg that you will say no more."

"I beg that you will hear me," entreated Carry. "I was hasty and unjust a few minutes since. I have been until now, perhaps, mistaken in you—blinded by my evil passions, I took false ideas for true convictions, until they wrecked me. But I loved my husband always, and standing erect in his pride, and his defiance of me, I still love him. Oh! Miss Merton, my wounded self-love ruined my life—it may yours!"

"Mrs. Galbraith, will you let me speak to you for a short while?—will you sit calmly by my side and let me tell you the object of my mission here?"

"If you will withdraw one rash assertion!"

"I will say nothing of the future—I will retract all that I have said concerning that which remains in God's hands—but I will make no promises."

"You are hard with me."

"No—I hope not!"

Carry repeated her assertion—she who would have repelled the rival, had she professed her love for Neal at an earlier stage of this meeting. To the last, a woman strange and inconsistent! She sat with her hands clasped, looking at the fire, trembling with her recent excitement, harassed by the thoughts of what would happen in the long afterwards, when Neal was free, and this young woman had turned away from him. Addie had drawn nearer to Carry in her interest; the subject on which she had come to dwell was approaching, and needed tact and earnestness. It had seemed an easy task till yesterday—but now the chances were against her, Neal was even against her also. She even felt a secret indignation against Neal's last step, Neal's last instance of his inflexible will, that had rendered her the bearer of ill news, when she would have brought only peace.

"I wish to speak of Neal, as *your* husband, Mrs. Galbraith. You will bear with me?"

"A strange subject!—well?"

"In your heart, may I ask, is there not rankling a sense of injury?—a belief that had he acted more kindly, more generously, in the past, so sad a life for man and wife need not have occurred?"

"I have outlived that belief. I make no excuses for myself now—my act, Miss Merton, was unpardonable!"

"He has not outlived that thought, however, and it renders him a better man."

"He?—*Neal!*"

Carry pressed her hands together, and looked eagerly at the speaker.

"He take a share of the blame? Oh! no, you are mistaken," she murmured.

"'Assure her that I might have been more generous!' were his words to my uncle yesterday."

"God bless him!" ejaculated Carry; "he sees that I was weak, not sinful. Miss Merton, you make me happy indeed!"

She pressed Addie's hand in hers, but Addie felt like a criminal. She would have reserved these

good tidings to the last, to sweeten a bitter fact approaching, but it was necessary that Carry should think the best of Neal, lest the man's last and most cruel resolution should strike her wholly down.

"What made him think of me, or talk of me?" Carry said, eagerly; "he and your uncle speaking together of the wife again? For what reason?"

"You thought that Neal had not forgiven the past."

"He judges me better in it, but he has not forgiven me."

"He has. He said——"

"Oh! I can have no forgiveness at second hand," said the wife, proudly. "When he and I are face to face, and he can say that with his heart, then I will believe him. Was there forgiveness in his manner to me when we met in this house? No—only the icy coldness that the wrong has set between us like a wall!"

"I have a message from him—especially for you, communicated to my uncle yesterday."

"A message to be sent to me—from him?"

"Yes."

"Why this sudden thought of me? Miss Merton, there is something more to tell."

"A little. He is about to go upon a long journey with his child."

To Addie's surprise, the revelation had not that bewildering, prostrating effect on Carry which might have been anticipated. The face paled wondrously but the firmness of the wife remained with her.

"When?" asked Carry.

"At twelve to-night."

"And he knows that I am dying, and would leave with me words of peace—not bring them with him, as one truly generous might have done. Firm to the very last!"

She had said a moment since that she would have no forgiveness at second hand; but the wish to know all was too intense, and Carry was more womanly in her weakness.

"What message sends he?" she asked eagerly.

Addie Merton told her. She had well learned the lesson of her uncle, and her uncle had not forgotten a word of Neal's last message. It fell upon greedy ears, and a thirsty heart; it came in time to cheer this stricken woman, who tried to keep the tears down—a vain effort in that hour when a long restraint was weakened by the earnestness of her companion.

When Addie had concluded, Carry said:

"I would be glad to hear those words again—to take them to my heart, and learn my lesson from them. Am I tiring you?"

"No."

Addie Merton repeated the long message—spoke once more of the child's departure, and Neal's reason for it—of his wish to forget the past, and sink the errors in it with his free forgiveness—of that share of the blame which he took upon himself, and which had tracked his steps, a black remorse despite all his sense of injury.

It was strange—very strange—that the threatened withdrawal of her child should affect Carry so little, compared with the knowledge of Neal Galbraith's better thoughts of her—a knowledge that altered much that world-weary face.

"And your uncle, knowing Neal so well, believes him?"

"Yes."

"That it is forgiveness—free, generous, and without a drawback but his presence here? Oh! is it possible?"

"It is the truth."

"I shall think so presently, I was not deserv-

ing wholly of forgiveness, although I went away heart-broken, believing in the last words he uttered, that he would be more content in life without me. Do you think—do you really think, now—that he meant those words?"

"He did not, Carry, I am sure."

"They drove me from home—they kept me ever away from it, even in the early days, when, with my pride abased, I crept back to his door, and waited there, and then stole off again—stole off in search of my brother, when I found my own living impossible to earn. He did not speak anything about that—that awful night?"

"No."

"He will take the child away—and before he and she come back again, I shall be dead. It is hard never to see them both again—if I were to go to him now—he would forgive me!"

"I would ask you to be patient, Mrs. Galbraith, and to wait. Neal *is* troubled still, and his first impulse is not always the best or most kind."

"You—you have not told him how near to the grave I am?"

"God only knows that!"

"Oh! you will not believe it either of you. If he knew that there was no hope, he would see me—assure me with his own lips of that forgiveness which you have brought to me. He was not always cold and hard like this—and he loved me very much once. My God! how he loved me in the early days!"

"Patience!" Addie murmured.

But her voice was broken itself, and the wife's trouble was hers.

"Had I come yesterday, I would have advised you to seek Neal out," said Addie; "it has been a hope of mine that he and you should meet again—that one home should shelter both of you."

Carry put her hand to her heart, and moaned with pain at this—the pain of such a thought after all that had passed!

"When he thought that you were drowned at sea, Carry, he used to tell me sometimes of his love for you, how deep and true it was, even in the first hour of his anger. I remembered all this when you came back to life, and I built a hope upon it, and worked patiently towards it until yesterday."

"And then?"

"Then my uncle sought to tell Neal of the hope that he had with me, and—Neal was going away."

"And took no consolation from your efforts—well, that was not likely! Miss Merton, forgive me if I have judged you uncharitably till now—you, my comforter, my husband's friend, the kind nurse whom my child loves. I see your truth, and my poor, wilful self, very plainly now."

"I have nothing to forgive," said Addie; "and you have nothing to thank me for, Mrs. Galbraith. You must remember, but not uncharitably, that I was acting for your husband's sake."

"Act for him in the future—and I will thank you in my grave," said Carry, with her old vehemence; "stand away from him, and I will haunt you!"

"I will believe in your better days and greater strength, Carry—you so young still."

"I am weaker than any one believes," said Carry, in a whisper; "to spare them all I have been very quiet. But the sand runs through the glass so rapidly, that I could name the day when a poor, lonely woman, aged and weak, will draw down the blinds in this house!"

"I hope not—I pray not."

"I shall die peacefully now—tell Neal so—ask your uncle to tell Neal so."

She spoke no more of the past or future, and Addie shortly afterwards, and with many words meant to be assuring—words that breathed of a world wherein there were no faults, and all was harmony—went from that home once more, this time rejoicing in that success which rewards at times honest and unselfish labour.

Meanwhile Carry was left to think of the news that had been brought her—to dwell upon it word by word—to detail it to the flinty old woman who resumed her place by that winter's fire, and who saw nothing in it "to make a fuss about."

"If I could only see him, mother—just once more."

"Stuff, Carry—he don't care for coming here, and we can live without him now. He's like a bit of brick."

"I don't think that I *can* die without I see him!" cried Carry, looking up with flushed cheeks and heaving bosom; "I—I think I ought to thank him."

"Much he'd care for that."

"Why, he may fancy that I am ungrateful!—I have been always defiant in my manner to him, facing him with a resistance that has only hardened him, when an appeal for pardon might have altered everything. And he goes away to-night."

"Then you can't see him—that's as positive as most things."

Carry sighed and resumed her thoughtful looks again, but the red flush on her cheeks died not out with her past animation. Presently the early night came on, the rain dashed against the glass, and the wind soughed dismally, as though burdened with painful thoughts like hers.

"I think it's getting late," said Mrs. Webber, waking from a doze and rubbing her eyes with her knuckles.

"No—it is early yet."

"What time that's striking?"

"Nine."

"Not more than that—eh?"

Mrs. Webber dozed off again, and when her chin was reposing on her chest, and her ten fingers spread out towards the fire in a disjointed fashion, the daughter rose silently and swiftly, and crossed

the room towards the door, whereat she stood looking back at the sleeper.

The door opened noiselessly, and still the second slumber of the mother undisturbed; an instant or two afterwards, the maid-servant was scared from dreams of her own at the kitchen fire, by the young mistress standing heavily shawled before her.

"Don't scream—don't look so frightened. I am going out."

"My gracious, Mrs. Galbraith—on such a night as this!"

"Yes, it is very important, and I must go. Don't tell my mother; she may sleep soundly upstairs until I return again—she may never know that I have been away, if you be careful. Come and shut the door softly behind me."

"Oh! dear, dear, dear! Don't go, mum—and you so delicate!"

"Hush!—you are noisy, and should have more self-possession at a time like this."

"Let me run for a cab."

"I will get one at the corner of the street—I am not going far."

"Oh! dear, dear, dear!" murmured the maid

again, following her mistress upstairs and along the passage to the outer door, which, being opened, let in a rush of wind and rain.

"Oh! look at the night now!"

"Will you be silent?" cried Carry, turning upon her fiercely; "this is a happy night for me! Keep your peace till I return."

She went out into the rain storm and away, walking with a rapidity that was very new to her in those days, and yet which she did not remark or seem to suffer from. She heeded nothing in her eagerness, not the pitiless down-pour of the rain, or the wind that shook her with its force at every desolate street corner. The place was very dark, and very empty of all human life; when she was in the Brixton road, no sign of a cab was visible, and the rain hissed at her like a thousand serpents. She hurried on, beset by one thought so near unto a hope that it gave lightness and vigour to her steps, and deadened all consciousness of danger.

A cab jolting along the road towards Kennington, with the driver heaped upon the box, butting his head against the rain. Carry called to him, and he seemed to hesitate, and then pass on. Carry

was hurrying on again, when he drove back towards her.

"How far are you going?" he asked.

"To Streatham—only a little way," she pleaded; "drive fast, and name your own price!"

"You're uncommon good, mum. That's an order we don't often get in our line."

He expected her to smile at this remark, but the white face did not light up at his pleasantry. He mounted the box, and proceeded to anathematize and flog the horse into rapid action. Carry was borne along at a good pace, the cab swaying to and fro, coming with a crash at last against the wheels of another cab rattling down the hill, a collision from which no damage ensued, and only brought things to a stand-still for a moment, engendering the most unseemly personalities between the drivers.

"Don't stop, please—I am pressed for time," cried Carry, lowering the window, "this is life and death!"

"All right, mum—come up, you brute!"

The horse stumbling and dashing up the hill towards Streatham—finally before the house of

Neal Galbraith, merchant. Carry sprang out, crying—

"Wait for me—I am going back!" and then struggled with the iron gate, and with herself, not strong and light of foot now, but growing very weak and faint.

The gate open, and Carry toiling slowly along the pavement, on which the lamp above the door was gleaming fitfully. At the door, knocking timidly and praying very earnestly for strength—a little more strength—until she was face to face with Neal!

The door open, and the traveller in her wet garments entering the hall, clinging almost to the wall, and scaring the strange woman who had admitted her.

"Mr.—Mr.—Gal—braith!"

Another door opening on the left, and one welcome face shining as it were from cloud-land—the honest, wondering face of Mrs. Higgs.

"Save us!—Carry!—you!"

"Neal!—where is he?—I must see him!"

"Go—gone away!"

"GONE!"

It was a wild, hopeless cry—a wail over the last hope that had died there—and then Carry fell forwards on the pavement of the hall!

CHAPTER IV.

CARRY MAKES HER LAST CONFESSION.

CARRY GALBRAITH came slowly back unto herself—wondering for an instant at the new world in which she was, and which loomed at her through the mists; then the truth came back with her, and brought a semblance of strength.

The room was well-furnished and well-lighted, but very misty still. It was some time before she could make out the figures in that room—who was the old white-haired man sitting near the fire, but looking anxiously towards her?—who the woman that held her hand and called her Carry, and asked her if she remembered yet?—who the taller, darker figure standing at a little distance from her, grave as destiny itself?

She sat up, pushed her hair back from her eyes, and made some hasty movement with her hands as though to dispel the mist before

her, which rendered everything so vague and indistinct.

"Who is that standing there—there facing me?"

"It is your husband, Neal," said the woman's voice, "and I am Aunt Higgs. There, you'll be better now."

"Neal," she said to him with her arms towards him almost appealingly, "they told me that you had gone away."

"I saw you in the cab which ran against my own," was the deep, not unmoved answer; "I have come back—what is it that you want with me?"

"I am glad that you are here!" she said, letting her hands fall to her side despairingly; "I have been very anxious to see you once again!"

Neal was silent. He stood looking on the ground, with a stern and yet a troubled face. Her presence there was still a mystery to him; still unwelcome there, Carry thought with a sinking heart.

"I am going away again in a minute—going away for good," she hastened to say, lest her pre-

sence there should be misunderstood, "but I heard that you were about to travel with our little girl—where is she?" she added looking wildly round.

"In her own room," said Aunt Higgs; "we didn't want to scare the child too much."

"—With its mother," added Carry, quickly; "that was right enough. I have scared too many already here. I think that I will—go now!"

She had seen no sympathy in him—no change on that face which had never, since their separation, smiled at her; Miss Merton had exaggerated some common-place words that he had used, and all was the same as before—not worse, not better! She half rose from the sofa on which she had been placed, and then sank back again. Patience, her strength had not come back yet—she must wait awhile.

"Will you tell me what has brought you hither, Mrs. Galbraith?" asked her husband; "I wish—I am anxious—to know."

"You sent me to-day, or I was told that you had sent me, a forgiveness for all the past—was that true?"

"True enough."

"Not a few words from the lip, wrung from

you by the exhortation of a good man, but a forgiveness from the heart, sir?"

"From the heart—yes."

"I could not believe it utterly—and I came to make quite sure before you went away. I knew that I should die more happily if I could hear you tell me that great truth, and I wished—so much, Neal!—to see you just once more."

Neal looked down intently at the carpet—his head bowed more and more, until his face was hidden from her.

"You must not mind me intruding on your house, set away from it, as from your love and trust in me—I will go away directly! But, Neal, as we shall never meet again on earth—as I am a woman repentant of all the misery that I have caused you—confessing here my great mistake, and sorrowing and suffering for it still, let me hear *you* speak of that forgiveness."

Neal looked up quickly, and motioned towards Mrs. Higgs, who moved across the room, took her old master by the arm, and led him away, leaving man and wife together. It was a strange pride of Neal's at the last, that removed all witnesses to his better feelings, his truer manhood.

He came rapidly towards her as the door closed on them, and then paused again, with his hands clenched, and his teeth set, almost as though he had repented of his charity.

"Neal—you are not sorry for those words you sent me?" she cried.

"No—forgiven, Carry, with all my heart and soul! Forgiven for that step which took you from me, when that heart was fondest!"

"When all chances of happiness had not met their death by my mad haste!" she said. "Forgiven for the dead track of years, followed by you and me—freely forgiven?"

"Freely!"

"Oh! Neal, this was worth coming for! I shan't mind dying now!"

She held her hands towards him again, and he took them in his own, and looked down upon her sadly.

"Why did you go away from me—you of all women—for a few bitter words, spoken in haste, and hastily recalled? Oh! Carry, what might have been!"

"You said that if you were rich—a rich man, with the means to set me from you—at a distance

where my presence could save you from pain—you would do it; it would be better for you, and bring more peace. You spoke—oh! Neal, you spoke as if I alone were in the way of your whole life, and I—I could not bear it, but went away at your wish, crushed down by my despair of ever gladdening your home! You seemed to prefer the whole world to me—and waking to that knowledge, I stole away to my own misery!"

"You were wrong—I was looking forward to a success in life that should have made all things better for us both. I was troubled in my struggle for it—and then came Tressider, and his letter to you. There, all has been explained long since, and I know all. We need speak no longer of the past—you and I, who have suffered much in it, and been both to blame."

"Not you, Neal. I take all that blame myself, and am happy now in your forgiveness of it. I will go now," she said, withdrawing her hands from his, and rising; "go back to my own home, strengthened, chastened by this confession, and at peace—with all! You will let me see my girl before I go?"

"Presently!—presently!"

"And, Neal, as I shall not see you any more, let me ask you sometimes to remember me. When you are married again—don't start, I wish that with all my heart, for your sake, and little Carry's! —try and think of me, when your own happiness may be risked by a harsh word. No mystery—and no distrust on either side—and harm will never come again."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going home now—after seeing Carry for a moment."

"No—you will stay!" cried Neal; "you must not talk of dying now—or of other wives for me. There steals upon me one more chance of happiness, and it will not be dashed from me. Carry, you must stay!"

"*Here!*—stay here, Neal?—and with *you?*"

"If you will. If you can trust your life with me, after all the past that has sundered us. There can be no true forgiveness without it. Stay!"

He held her in his arms, as though fearful that she would break away from him, and end this dream of better days; and Carry nestled to his heart there, and sobbed long and passionately.

"Oh! if I could live now!" she said wildly; "I

who do not wish to die, but to come back to life and you! Neal," looking up into his face with an intentness that awed him, "if the night were not so close upon the day, and all so nearly over!"

"It may not be—with God's grace and help, Carry!"

"It is close upon the end," she murmured. "I am very weak—I am so glad that we have met like this! It wasn't right to regret God's will, Neal—but then I have always been so discontented, and it is like me to the last. Bear with me just a little while—my husband!"

* * * * * *

Carry never went back to her mother's home. The new life began, and the old life died out together, and with them both, Carry gave up all struggling.

At peace with her husband, with her stormy self, with the world narrowing before her gaze, and the broader, brighter world stretching out beyond, there was no cause for struggling. Nothing to repine for at the last, when the fretfulness at God's will—common to our poor humanity—had passed away, and she could feel that it was happiness to lie thus loved by every one about her;

and greater happiness to think of coming rest from all petty troubles and all past misconceptions of life's duties.

To lie there, very weak, but very calm and still —forgiven all past trespasses on earth, and with faith to believe in their redemption in heaven. To know that she should pass away from that sick couch in a little while, and that no one would rejoice at it, but sorrow for her as for one dearly loved!

Neal kept his place by that bed, which she never left again—to which she had been led on that night of reconciliation, and lay down content to die there. Day and night, for the little while left them both to be together, Neal sat and watched and prayed—not content himself yet, but trying to learn his lesson from her resignation, and thinking of the follies and faults of his own life that had not sought to end disunion at an earlier period. Looking at her, so young still, still so beautiful, could he believe in the years that had intervened since they had spoken last of their love for one another? Could he, with her hand in his, and her full, wistful eyes bent on him—as though doubting his forgiveness even yet!—believe that

theirs had been such bitter quarrelling, parting each irrevocably till that day? A smile or two, a few fair words, a little honourable self-restraint, a still more honourable frankness, and all the errors, miscalculations, wrongs of two young lives, might have been swept away into outer darkness. But they had closed their eyes upon the light, and passed into the nether land—and here the moral in the dying woman—and in the life disappointed, that was shadowed forth in that hour.

But not *in* her, to whom the memory of past trials brought no pain—who looked back with a regret that was for Neal's sake—not for hers then.

The mother was in the house, waiting and watching with Mrs. Higgs for the last—seeing Carry now and then, and scarce believing yet that her daughter would really die and leave her entirely alone. Joe and his wife came softly into the room once a day to speak to Carry, to talk with assumed cheerfulness of matters very foreign to the sick woman's thoughts, and then to go downstairs with faces full of gloom. Mr. Pike and Addie had seen her, and bidden her good-bye; to both she had whispered something, and from both she had extorted a promise, and they were

gone, too—only her child and Neal were left her now; they were to be all in all to her till the time for their parting stole upon them.

"Neal," she said, one day to him, "you are not building rashly—almost wickedly—on my return to health and strength now?"

"No—not now," he murmured.

"You are resigned?"

"God will bring me resignation in His own good time!"

"Why, we should never have been at peace—and it is so merciful of Him to end the story thus, parting us so happily! Think, Neal, of my old nature coming back with my new strength, and you and I beginning afresh our troubles!"

"Never again would there have been anything but peace between us, Carry."

"Ah! it is easy to say that, in an hour like this," said Carry; "but I have always been strange and wilful, and it was never ordered that happiness should follow my steps. So much the better for you and me to say good-bye."

"No—no!"

"In the time left you, I see your better life, Neal," she said, laying her hand upon the dark

hair of her husband; "you are very young still, and will have new thoughts, new pursuits, new duties. You will marry Addie Merton some day."

"I will walk through life alone—I am for ever resolved to——"

"Neal," she said very quickly, "I ask, for your own sake, no rash promises. I see the future for my husband, and it is a happy one, with a woman who is patient, earnest, self-denying, and God-fearing—who will love my husband very dearly, and be a good mother to my child, making all things light. This picture will come true—I see it in the distance very bright, and it renders me content to part with you."

"Don't speak again," moaned Neal.

He could not see the brightness then—he faced his dying wife, and felt but the agony of their coming separation—of marriages and giving in marriage he could not dwell upon. But in the future he remembered Carry's prophecy, and saw how true it was. Years afterwards he was happy, but not till years had passed, and Carry's was a gentle, peaceful memory, did he, remembering her wish, and thinking of that past which has formed

a subject for this story-book, take unto himself a wife all-fitting for him.

But to sit by Carry's bedside and talk of a new wife was a mockery at which his heart recoiled in that hour; he was very sorrowful, and the loneliness of life was coming back to him again, although he had promised resignation.

Late in the week, he came face to face with the worst—or the best, for it was directed by the Wise Hand. Sitting at her bedside in the greyness of a wintry afternoon, he thinking and she lying there so still, her voice—as if far away from him already—whispered his name softly.

"Carry, you spoke to me," he said, bending over her.

"Yes, dear—*I am going!*"

"No—no—not like this—not without a word to me."

"Call—Carry—and—*the rest.*"

They were in the room, all those whom she loved, and with whom she had made her peace; they came in with that stealthy tread, that reverence for the mystery of death and life to come, which makes rooms akin to these, places of sacred farewell to the dear ones going their long journey.

"I thought—that you would like to say good-bye—to me," she whispered—"and Carry—won't be frightened at her—mother!"

"Oh! my poor mamma!"

"Hush! dear—your mamma is so happy now with you—and *him!*"

She strove to reach her hand out to her husband, but life's last impulse was not strong enough. Neal, who detected the movement, leaned forward, and clasped her hand in both of his.

"This—is—forgiveness, I'm sure!" she murmured.

The hand that lay in Neal's turned very cold, but the arm that pressed the child to her had power in it yet. Neal bent over her and kissed her long and tenderly. A little quivering of the lips—a closing of the eyes—and then life, and all life's mistakes, were at an end for ever!

THE END.

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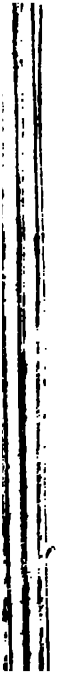

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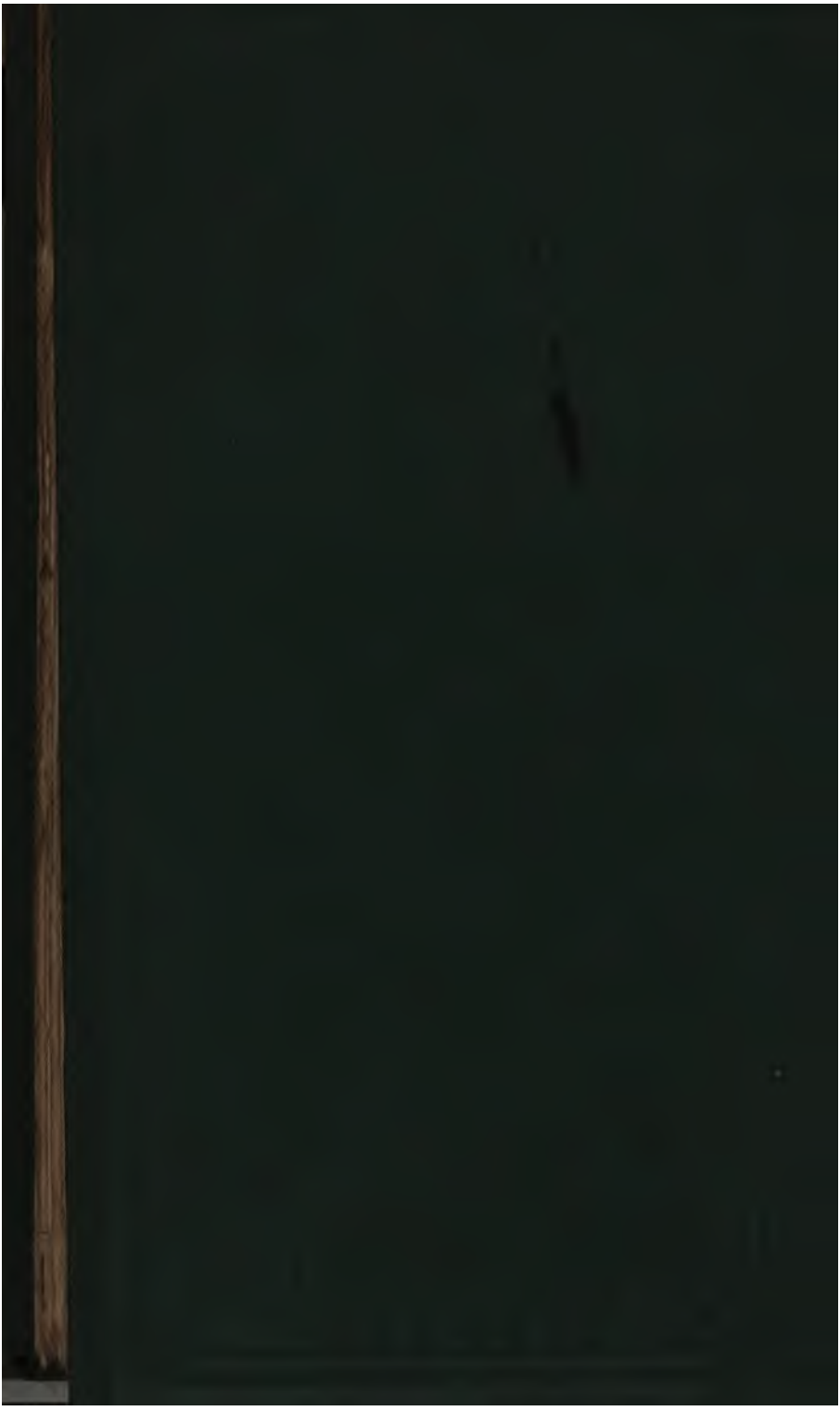
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